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# DIANA GAY



BY

## PERCY FITZGERALD

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DIANA GAY.



# DIANA GAY;

OR,

## THE HISTORY OF A YOUNG LADY.

BY

PERCY FITZGERALD, M.A., F.S.A.,

AUTHOR OF "NEVER FORGOTTEN," "SECOND MRS. TILLOTSON," "75 BROOK STREET," "BELLA DONNA," ETC., ETC.

" For her 'tis one long summer's day ;  
For her 'tis always sun.  
Round her the softest zephyrs play ;  
Her the rude breezes shun.

She knows not sorrow, knows not pain ;  
And merry is her glance ;  
For her 'tis all a jocund strain,  
And life seems but a dance."

JOHN MARSHALL (1690).

LONDON:

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1877.

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In fond memory  
OF  
D. F.,  
IMPERFECTLY SKETCHED  
IN  
THE FOLLOWING STORY.





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# DIANA GAY.

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## BOOK THE FIRST.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### AT SCHOOL.

**P**ROSPECT-HOUSE ACADEMY—a seminary for young gentlemen of genteel birth—lay about four miles from the market-town of Calthorpe, and was known by a dignified entrance gateway, always securely closed, and a general park-like air. It combined all manner of healthful advantages, and had formerly been the private residence of William Freeman, Esq., before that gentleman had broken down, and been compelled to retire to Boulogne. In this former residence the Rev. Doctor Wheeler entertained some seventy young boarders, of unexceptionable connections, at the sum of ninety guineas a year each, with extras—which impaired the value of the limit—the Doctor himself looking after the morals and the higher mathematics, and, it must be added, the birch department, in the case of serious offenders only and the more abandoned criminals; while the presence of Mrs. Wheeler (it was almost plaintively

A

put forward in the prospectus) was a guarantee for "the comforts of a home," cookery, and for the linen, &c., being kept in good preservation. It must be said, however, that the young gentlemen were not at all inclined to accept this pleasant deception, and used to speak of this kindly guardian of their interests most disrespectfully as "Old Mother Wheeler."

Doctor Wheeler was accustomed to have periodical exhibitions of his youths, to which neighbours and the few parents and guardians who lived within easy range, were invariably invited. At Christmas there was a play; at Easter, Midsummer, and such seasons there were examinations, recitations, and premiums. The preparations for such displays took up a vast deal of time and labour. Even the boys said they were all "show-off" things, and merely "Wheeler's advertisements;" but still, when the parents and guardians came, and saw their charges performing such public marvels, they naturally, though illogically, assumed that such brilliant exercises were the spontaneous and habitual efforts of the daily life of the establishment, and went home singing the Doctor's praises.

Plenty of fine meadows and some good old trees lay about the exiled Freeman's mansion, which was swept by healthful breezes, and had a view of a great spread of country. The mansion itself was good red brick, with a row of yellow stone vases on the top; and the head of the house, by knocking away partitions, &c., had made everything airy and wholesome. Fresh air and exercise were not charged for in the extras, and the Doctor well knew that a reputation for a healthy school was most profitable, and could be had very cheaply indeed.

One day the boys were out at their cricket on a well-shaven lawn close to the house; the air was filled with the pleasant and jocund cries of youth—an eager buzz and chatter as spontaneous as that of busy bees. There was the zest, the sense of enjoyment, the delight in the blessings of the moment, the fresh air, the sense of mere living, which perhaps will pass away later. As there came the

smart, quick "whack," and the ball was seen to fly, there rose the frantic and uproarious invitation to "Run! run!" or "Stay! stay!" and the two white figures kept crossing each other frantically, while a third seemed to bound and scud desperately after something, like a hare through the grass. The Doctor, in his academic gown (which he never laid aside, except when going out to ride, and which the boys said "he slept in"), stood afar off at the edge of the garden, with his hands behind him, looking on with approbation. His lips seemed to move, and say, "Now, there is no charge for all this—no extra. See what healthful advantages this Ease-tablishment combines!" Mrs. Wheeler, with the whole linen of the whole house lying in perfect bales on her mind, is sometimes seen at the dormitory, when a roar of delight, aroused by some good stroke, draws her with uneasiness to the window; for she is thinking how all this exertion would tell on her department. Mr. Whitty, the usher, waits about the ground, by courtesy acting as umpire, but officially present as a sort of policeman. Mr. Whitty had not time to read "Elia," or he might have cried out, with the unique essayist, "What a pity to think that these fine generous lads will in a few years be stupid members of Parliament!" But there was a special reason for the air of joyous elation that was abroad. A day or so more had to run out, and then came "going home." That most delightful of festivals, breaking-up day—enjoyed more than ever shall be place or title won, money earned, estate bequeathed, or election into Parliament—welcomed with a rapture never to be known later—was drawing nigh. Everybody was in delight and good-humour—in all but maudlin affection—with his neighbour. The Doctor was kindly and almost womanly tender in his manner and address, speaking to his charges with plaintive affection, with a "Richard, now!" or an "Ah, Alfred!"—a rare honour, they being usually challenged by their surname in a blunt, surly tone. The Doctor came and mingled with his pupils, and almost seemed to be trying to impart an air of sentiment to their separation. "Well,

you are going home, Richard, to en-jeeoy yourself. Well, we have tried to do all we could with you,—make you good and virtuous and learned. You are not sorry to go, I suppose, Richard—eh, now?”

Richard, standing with a cricket-bat in his hand, answered off-hand, “Lord bless you, Doctor Wheeler, I am ready to jump out of my skin! Only think—on Friday morning I shall be going round to the stable in the fresh morning to mount Sir Roger! And then away—‘Yoicks!’—to the meet. How I long to be patting his fine coat! Ah, very different that, Doctor, from turning in for morning prayers!”

The Doctor looked a little scared at this irreverent comparison; but it was the time of saturnalia.

“I hope you will say your prayers faithfully, Richard,” said the Doctor, “and let nothing on earth interfere with that most solemn and important duty. Think what would be your situation if you were brought home on a shutter or a gate! How very small Sir Roger, and the meet, and all that-er sort of thing will appear at such a moment!”

It was Richard’s turn to bowl or play, so he did not answer; but he often boisterously took off the Doctor’s plaintive appeal—“Think how I’d feel on a door! I suppose I wouldn’t feel at all! Indeed, it became a sort of standing joke among the hunting-men who were told the story, and who were vastly amused at Dick’s imitation of the Doctor.

Everything was enjoyment, and a flutter of delighted expectation. All the labour, the study, the hodman’s work, was out of the way; the examinations, conducted by two Oxford gentlemen brought down specially, were over. The Doctor did anything that brought him into relation with the public in the most correct style. “We have no second-class way here,” he would say to the parents and guardians. The coming of these university gentlemen, who stayed nearly a week, was an awful solemnity. They went through their work with a cold austerity that chilled the victims. Even their encouragement was as the reassuring manner of dentists. But on the exhibi-

tion-day one of them usually made a speech before the ladies and gentlemen assembled, conceived in a tone of surprising warmth and commendation, and seasoned with many compliments to the Doctor and the "efficiency of his establishment." Rarely in the course of a long university experience had he heard better answering; and his friend and brother examiner, Mr. Ferrier, who, as most of us know, was a little hard to satisfy in the direction of Greek—what scholar had not by heart "Ferrier on the Greek Theatre"?—bade him say that the Greek answering and construing had really quite surprised him. And the speaker looked over with an amused air—and all the company also—at Mr. Ferrier, who was sitting, glasses on, and chin in the air, gazing sternly before him, as who should say, "It's true. I admit it reluctantly. It has been wrung from me."

Charming season—all joy, all recreation. To-morrow was what was known as "packing-up day," when the seventy devoted the whole morning to getting their property together, and putting it away in the great trunks which are in favour with schoolboys. A portmanteau will not hold jams, cakes, or bottles so conveniently. This was in itself a delightful pastime, and took some time. Mrs. Wheeler assisted, and indeed it was the great day of the year for that lady. A festival not, however, untinged with sadness; for the linen, &c., was then fairly taken off her mind, and she liked the responsibility. During vacation she wandered about purposeless, vacant—seeking something restlessly, she knew not what. It was her province, too, to restore goods of a contraband sort, seized at the frontier, and detained for the security of the house. For the young gentlemen had an almost stupid tendency to encumber themselves with articles—like fowling-pieces, hunting-whips, gunpowder, large meerschaum-pipes, and such matters—which they knew could not be introduced surreptitiously, and would be stopped by the authorities. It was perhaps with a view to the remote luxury of holding them in their possession and displaying them publicly even for that single day. Mrs. Wheeler was going about re-

storing the seized property—every article being ticketed and carefully labelled. She had a staff of the maids under her, and with their aid was minutely accurate about the socks, shirts, &c. She often told what she went through on that day.

The game was going on in this pleasant meadow of Prospect House—which the Doctor with prudent forethought “grazed” during vacation—a sort of parting “match” between eastern and western counties, and played once a year with all solemnity and immense spirit and vigour on both sides. One of the Oxford examiners generally took a bat. Mr. Ferrier always walked by himself, and sat by a river making pencil-notes to his new edition of the “Greek Theatre.” A gentleman from Bath, who came what was considered an enormous journey to take home his son, also played, declaring “he was a western-counties man.” The “parson’s son” from the village took another bat; and the villagers were allowed to come up and stand gaping near the tent.

“We must be kind,” said the Doctor, “to our neighbours and dependants. It is only a little thing, and costs nothing, eh, Richard?”

Richard, with his eye on the bowling, answered, with his customary sudden and loud laugh—

“To be sure, sir; nothing like kindness where it comes so cheap.”

The Doctor smiled a little awkwardly. He stood rather in awe of this off-hand manner of his pupil.

“A very high spirited, bold, forward lad,” he said to the gentleman from Bath, whose performances could be called “playing” by merest courtesy, he being knocked out generally at the first bowl unless indeed his wicket had been saved by the ball striking his person.

“Do you know, I am rather anxious about his future career? I am indeed. He is impetuous. He is a son of Mr. Lugard, whom, by the way, you will see on our ex-hi-beetion day. A most por-lished, accomplished, elegant man as you’d meet. I hope he will turn out well, I do.—Well done, Master Robert; very well indeed!—a

very promising lad that—careful, stay-dy,” the Doctor chanted in this way—as though he were pilot of a ship,—“staydy, sir, and will do. We have the highest opinion of him. Lugard is, perhaps, our most brilliant lad—carries all before him. Our friend Robert is *all* study and good sense; but not much parts, you know. For years Richard Lugard has got everything we have to give, and with literally no trouble to himself.”

It was now the beginning of the evening; the sun was seen very low, through those dark trees where the rooks were cawing so noisily, and under which the late owner, W. Freeman, Esq., had often looked over-fondly at his residence. It would soon be time to go in, for the dew would be falling, and it would not do to be sending our boys back to parents and guardians with anything on the lungs. Prospect House was jealously careful about heath; had the village apothecary conveniently at hand for his daily visit; and, besides, Dr. M’Bean, in good practice at the great town ten miles off, came out regularly once a month.

One of the lads had been “in” a long time, playing with a steady caution and wariness, never attempting a run unless there was an ample margin for security. His partner, enthusiastically rushing to make fresh runs, was often abruptly brought up in his course, as by a jerk, by seeing his companion standing coolly at his wicket, and had to get back in disorder.

“Confound you, Bligh!” this aggrieved player would call out, having barely saved himself. “What are you afraid of? We might have made another there. He’s no dash or pluck, and only thinks of saving himself.” But the other was fortified in the approbation of his own side, and laughed very good-humouredly at any pettishness.

One voice on the other side was very conspicuous in its impatience, and came from a tall, light-haired, high-cheeked, impetuous youth, of about sixteen, who was now behind Bligh, stopping the balls. He was loud in his directions. “Put him out! Now then, butter-



fingers ! I knew you'd miss that. 'Pon my word, Syntax, you *are* playing a sneaking game ! Well done, my cautious Doctor !" By which it would seem that " Doctor Syntax " was the familiar *sobriquet* by which Bligh was known to his friends. There was an almost gratuitous vindictiveness in the way he used to hurl the ball straight at the wicket, even when he was a little late, and not likely to do the player any mischief, as the ball would come low and stinging, and graze the player's leg.

" The Doctor " would remonstrate calmly :

" Why do you do that, Lugard ? It don't help the game a bit."

" Never you mind," Lugard answers. " You look after your stumps, or I'll have you out next time, for all your caution. Here I'll bowl now. We must put a stop to this."

" Going to bowl ? " said the Doctor, fixing his blue eyes on him earnestly. " Oh, I am so glad, Dick ; I like your bowling."

" Do you, Doctor, really now ? " said the other. " I suppose you think you can do what you like with them. Look out, I tell you." And Dick Lugard began to bowl a series of " low level," plunging " balls," which came tearing and " ricochetting " along, and were quietly " blocked " away by Bligh, without any exertion. In this effort it was possible to see the figures of both boys to advantage, that of Lugard being long, wiry, and almost Indian in its suppleness, and not in the least robust or full. His face was long also, very sunburnt (at other seasons pale), and his light hair thick and heavy, which he had a habit of impatiently tossing back from his forehead.

He carried his head very high as he came up to any group, walking always fast and as if for a purpose, with his arms swinging. He seemed to look downwards over them, with half-closed eyes, and an air of half-amused contempt, as who should inquire, " What folly is up now ? " He was ready of tongue ; said whatever came uppermost ; did not measure his words when " put out." He had all the common attributes of a " fine fellow," and yet was not popular as the common fine fellows are. There was

something always hurtful or unpleasant in his jesting way of accosting his companions ; and when he joined a little coterie, some shy lad would find Lugard's eyes wandering up and down superciliously over his figure, with a smile of amused inquiry, preparatory to a question : " Well, my lady, where's your veil on this warm day ; your complexion will be all spoiled, won't it ? " Then he would give a loud, hearty laugh. He would break into a discussion, after coming up suddenly, with a rough " Why, you big grown-up fool, what nonsense you are talking ! what a figure you'll cut in the world ! " And they commonly had to put up with this language ; for Lugard, with all these powers of sarcasm, had strong arms and an intrepid spirit, and on small provocation, would fly back, and, with flashing eyes and squared arms, offer at once to settle the matter then and there. Once, indeed, when the Doctor himself was but a few yards away, Lugard on some provocation had fiercely broken out into open battle, and in defiance of that awful authority, who with horror in face vainly strove to part the combatants.

" Mr. Whitty !—Lugard ! stop, sir ! " the aghast Doctor was crying. " Do you know what you are doing ? stop, sir ! stop, sir ! " to which cries the excited Lugard paid not the least attention, but, tossing the hair out of his eyes, pushed away the Doctor, utterly unconscious of his presence, and rushed at his opponent again. Many councils were held to consider " what was to be done with Lugard ; " but his very audacity and indifference saved him. A stray blow from his enemy during that encounter had left a mark on his cheek, which the sudden interruption by the coming up of Mr. Whitty and others had prevented his revenging. And he never rested until he had arranged a private meeting under the trees behind the garden-wall, where, uninterrupted and at his leisure, his impetuous onslaught carried the day and wiped out his temporary disgrace.

Lugard was now bowling away desperately, but without change of fortune. Between his balls he was calling to Bligh in his usual taunting strain : " You're a safe fellow !

*You'll* never wet your feet. You'll get on, my boy—looking after every farthing, and picking up every pin. I'd be ashamed to make such a game as that!" To which the other only answered by a good-humoured nod and smile, and a "Fire away! Do your worst, Lugard; I'm ready for you." Until at last came the sound of the gong, hanging from the branch of a tree, and sounded in person by Mr. Whitty; the play had to stop, and Bligh was not "out."

Lugard had flung down the ball in a rage, and walked in with the rest, loudly declaiming all the while.

"*He* calls *that* playing," he said, pointing to the other. "We ought all to live to Methuselah's age to play like that. Have you no dash or pluck, man, that you are afraid to give a fellow a chance? What was that old Wheeler said about a boy being the father of the man? Nice, cautious, canny son *you'll* have, my lad!" And as usual Dick Lugard finished with a loud vigorous, scoffing laugh, in which he invited every one around to join.

Bligh laughed also, much more genuinely.

"That's very good, though it's against me," he said. "If you were to say that when we get into the House of Commons—"

"Lord, Lord! you listen to the Doctor," said Lugard, stopping and leaning on his bat. "When he gets into the House! With that sort of batting you'll get there, never fear—ha, ha!"

Presently came supper in the large refectory, where all the seventy ate together, and performed such daily prodigies as boys only can do—in that direction transcending even ploughmen. There was a noisy banquet. Lugard loudly criticised the game in his accustomed tone.

"Ah, but Bligh is coming on," said one of them. "You couldn't polish him off so readily."

"Couldn't I, wiseacre!" answered the other impetuously. "A precious deal *you* know. I knocked you out in good style. As for him, if a man chooses to take the trouble of a safe sneaking game, why, well and good. I wouldn't do it for a salary, I know. I'm for getting everything with a dash, or letting it alone. It don't pay, either.

That medal which I suppose they'll be giving me on the exhibition-day, I wouldn't cross the room for it, if I had to slave and creep and drudge for it. I declare no, seriously now, though it looks like affectation. It won't pay me, it takes too much time."

"But my dear boy," said Bligh, "that's very well for you; but what's to become of the poor dull fellows who have nothing to go on but their drudgery, and haven't your talents?"

"My talents!" said the other, in high good-humour. "Come! no sawdaring me, Doctor. I declare I am in such spirits to-night I have quite an affection for old Wheeler."

"Ah, you can be in spirits, Lugard," said another; "everything comes easy to you. You'll be walking up as usual to-morrow, and have a swell putting the great silver medal round your neck, while poor Bligh there, who has worked till he is blue in the face, will come up for a two-and-sixpenny prize for French and Catechism, or something in that way."

"Or good conduct," said Lugard with a boisterous laugh; "he beats me there. Not but that, if I set myself to shine in that line, I might do as well as another fellow. I suppose I should.—But keep up, Bob; you'll get plenty, never fear, and deserve it. For I must say you do work hard, and I hope you'll succeed very well."

And after this handsome speech every one looked with admiration at Lugard, and said afterwards how nobly he could behave. Robert Bligh was touched, and said—

"Thank you, Lugard. You have always been generous. It is brains after all that is worth anything; any common fellow can work. But when a man hasn't the other, he has only his labour to fall back on."

"Modest fellow!" said Lugard, laughing. "Listen to him! Well, Doctor, I *do* hope you will get plenty to-morrow; and I am sure you will. I don't care twopence about myself; it's only for the sake of my governor, who is always at me, and wants me to cut a figure in everything, if it's only in crossing the street."



## CHAPTER II.

### THE TWO BOYS.

**T**HAT last evening the boys were strolling about the playground, very happy, in parties of two and three. The sun had gone down, and there was a pleasant air of repose over the late W. Freeman, Esquire's, lawns, which that ejected proprietor had often enjoyed as its chief attraction. There was a sense, too, of quiet happiness in the minds of those who wandered about—a security in the sense of the grand coming enfranchisement of the morrow, the happiest day of the year. In that light the Doctor seemed almost angelic—the best of men—and there was compunction for various organised annoyances towards him.

Here he was now at the door, with letters in his hand; and presently Mr. Whitty called for Lugard and Bligh.

“I find,” said the Doctor, in a gush of complacent agitation, “that to-morrow’s solemnity will quite go beyond what we expected. We shall have the whole of Calthorpe here to-morrow: Mr. Bowman and Lady Mary—they are thinking of placing one of their sons here—Dr. Windle the rector, your father Mr. Lugard, and Mr. Gay of Gay Court.”

Both boys started. “Mr. Gay, sir! Has he come back?”

“Yes; just returned from his tour.—Now, Mr. Whitty, what I was thinking,—we must expand our original programme a little, to do honour to all this people. I was

thinking of—er—a little debate, eh, between these two : something dramatic and lively !—What do you say, young gentlemen ? ”

“ I’m game ? ” said Lugard. “ Whatever you like. And are you sure, sir, the squire’s coming ? My father said nothing of it. ”

“ The squire, ” said the Doctor dreamily ; “ the squire—who ? ”

“ Mr. Gay, of course, sir. ”

“ Oh dear yes ; here’s his letter. You can take any subject, you know : ‘ Was Napoleon or Cæsar the greatest warrior ? ’—Pitt or Fox ? Something that way, eh, Mr. Whitty ? ”

“ Nothing better than the first, sir, ” said that gentleman obsequiously.

“ Dear me ! ” said the Doctor dreamily, “ I had no idea what curiosity seems to be excited about the ease-tableshment. I really think we must begin the alterations this year. And see here : send me little Brown, Mr. Whitty. I must put a complimentary line or so into his Prologue. ”

The two boys walked away together. “ By Jove, this is news ! ” said Lugard reflectively ; “ and so sudden too. ”

“ Oh, we’ll pick up the facts easily enough to-night. I know Cæsar pretty well. ”

“ It’s not *that*, ” said Lugard impatiently. “ I mean the squire ; I am so glad he’s come back. He’s a *good* fellow ! ”

“ I wonder, ” said Bligh, looking over with great earnestness at two far-off boys who were walking together, “ will she—Miss Diana—come with him ? ”

The other turned and looked at him hastily. “ Do you think she will ? Oh, I wish she did ! And why not, if they’re all—Lady Mary and the rest—coming ? ”

“ She is sure to come, I *think*, ” said his friend speculatively. “ The squire wouldn’t leave her. He wouldn’t have any party without her. ”

“ My dear Doctor, ” said Lugard enthusiastically, “ you

are right. I declare you have a world of good sense, which will stand to you. You'll get on, after all, never fear; I tell you so. Of course she'll come; I didn't think of that. By Jove, what a day it will be! And, I say, think of my marching up there, before all the swells, to get the medals and prizes; and the fellows clapping and cheering, and her bright little face looking on! And I tell you what, Doctor; I'll make my governor give Wheeler a hint to get *her* to put the ribbon round my neck. That *will* be a moment! I declare I am glad I studied now."

Something grave and even rueful in the face of his companion struck Lugard, and he stopped. He did not relish this prospect of his glories not being joined in with all his own personal enthusiasm. "Oh, I see," he said, "what's in your cautious mind—counting my chickens, and all that. I don't deny it. But still, I think, for a fellow that has got what he wanted every year he tried, and with very little trouble to himself, it's not *very* great vanity, or arrogance, or whatever you may call it. Or," he added, with sudden suspicion, "perhaps you think I am disposing of *your* chance? Have you put on extra labour, eh? or are you going to steal a march on me?"

"I have no chance, Dick," said the other calmly. "I worked hard certainly, but am content to have my usual luck. It will add to your glory too."

"I wonder how she is looking," said Lugard softly. "What a little charmer she was that Christmas! Do you remember her that night at Gay Court, ordering us about as if she was an Eastern queen—sending us out of the room, and calling us back?—that is you, I believe," added Lugard, with one of his loud laughs; "she seemed she couldn't worry *you* enough!"

Again that curiously wistful look came into the other boy's face.

"She is a beauty," went on Lugard. "Who was it said of a girl she was a trinket—a charm to put at the end of your watch-chain? Not a bad description at all."

"Rather free and easy, and not very respectful, I think," said the other, a little warmly.

"I'd like to see the fellow say it of *her*," said Lugard, with some inconsistency; "I'd kick him while I could stand over him. An ass's head would be the thing for *his* watch-guard."

Now came up Johnson, a companion and humble admirer of the Lugard despotism. "What's all this," he asked, "about all the swells coming? Is it true about old Gay?"

"Old Gay!" said Lugard, his lip curling. "Do you hear him now? Did you ever speak to the man, or stop at his house? No, of course you didn't: nor is he likely to ask you. Well, what d'ye want to know about him?"

"Nothing," said the other, a little abashed; "only I thought—"

"Only he thought! *Only*, indeed! Why, if fellows *did* think, we shouldn't have such foolish speeches so often! Well, he is coming; and so are lots more."

"Oh! and I say, Lugard, do you think will his daughter come?—that nice girl you used to tell us of?"

The other frowned. He did not relish this "making free with the name of a lady in public." But then he, in unguarded confidence, had on some dull evenings thrown out hints about this peerless young lady, and, on being rallied in a flattering way on standing high in her favour, had not at all repelled the compliment. The wisest and most philosophic, the oldest and most experienced, are seldom proof against this shape of adulation, if the censer be but adroitly swung. While other incensings will have but poor success, and are received with a smile which shows that the "swinger's" object is seen through, this floats up gratefully into the innermost recesses of the nostrils. Who, then, shall blame a schoolboy?

"I am sure she'll come," said the other. "I am dying to see her.—Don't you envy this lucky fellow, Bligh? We shall see him walking up under her eyes to get his medals!"

Boys have no delicacy or feeling for each other's sensi-



tiveness ; so he did not consider the toiling Bligh in this speech.

"Oh, I suppose she'll come," said Lugard, with a careless air, "though I don't think it's likely. My father knows hers, and hers knows mine ; and I've gone over there and shot, you know. And bless you, why, there's his keeper Mundy would just do anything for me,—sell me his best dog, or horse, or gun, or anything I liked. I know every rood of the place. And so, you see, it comes all natural."

Though the logic was a little imperfect here, and even the proof given of the keeper's regard not a very extraordinary one, still the explanation seemed to settle everything. And Johnson, deeply impressed, said with feeling (and illogically again), "Jove ! she *must* be a charming creature."

"Oh you don't know her," said Lugard, growing confidential ; "how could you ? I hope to Heaven she comes. I should like the fellows to see her ; and I am sure she is so improved by being abroad ; because she *has*, you see, a sort of foreign look."

"Bligh here knows her too," struck in Johnson inconsequentially.

"Oh yes ; I suppose he does, in a way."

"About the same time as Lugard," said Bligh, in his quiet way. "Perhaps not so intimately."

"Perhaps not," said Lugard, with a laugh. "Knowing a person the same time means nothing—proves nothing. Give me a fortnight, and I'll know as much of a person as another—take Bligh here—would in six months."

As usual, every one was silenced, and Bligh seemed to accept this refutation and own his inferiority.

"Who is she like ?"

"How could I tell you !" went on Lugard.

"Is she as good-looking—as Betty who comes with the clothes ? I mean," added Johnson hastily, getting alarmed at the look in Lugard's face,— "I mean *in her way*."

"In her way ! Why, Betty's the scum of the earth, compared to her ! Why, she's the most delicate little

princess you could conceive. Not so little neither—a bit of china, you know, like the cup my father bought at Paris, for which he gave ten guineas. While as for poor Betty, you might as well think of the crockery wash-hand-stand jug or basin upstairs.”

Both listeners looked at each other in genuine admiration. This ready simile was often after retailed in the school as a proof of Lugard's genius. Even the Doctor smiled on it, and said it was “happy.”

“I know her so well,” went on Lugard, encouraged and pleased with himself; “you see we are quite friendly and intimate. She often used to consult me on this or that thing, and I'd of course give her what advice I could—such as it was,” added Mr. Lugard modestly, “and my father knowing hers, and all that. And I can tell you she'll have all Gay Court and his estates; the squire will leave her every penny—no other child, you know; and my father, who's a man of the world and picks up everything, says he *knows* he can't be worth a penny less than seven thousand a year clear, which she will be able to do what she likes with.”

And Mr. Lugard nodded his head significantly, and, really without intending it, conveyed to his hearers that all these desirable advantages had a deep reference to him.

Johnson was greatly impressed, and went away silent.

Presently the gong rang out. It was time to go to bed. They all went into the chapel, where the Doctor performed night prayers—shortened in compliment to the holiday approaching. It was to be the last time. Then they all went to rest, in the sweetest anticipation, full of hope and good-will to all the world, finding it a little hard to force the eyelids to drop. There was a sort of flutter at their hearts.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE GREAT DAY.

**T**HE next morning was a bright and hopeful one. They all came down betimes, buoyant and yet not noisy. The sense of happiness, overpowering almost, exercised a silent influence. There was another more physical influence at work. For three weeks before, a delightful operation had been gone through of having private interviews with the authorised tailor of the establishment, and choosing "new clothes" from his card of patterns. There was something all but fascinating in this office—a link, as it were, between school and the world outside. It was being like men. Yet, in most instances, the taste was a little wild and extravagant, the selection of colours gaudy, in defiance of the artist's protest; whose remonstrance, however, was cleverly silenced by Wells, known as "little Topsy," who asked reasonably, "Why he had 'em among his patterns, if they weren't to be chosen?" A remark that left him, as it was said, "without a leg to stand on."

Now these glorious garments had all come home, and the boys were walking about resplendent in their finery. Lugard, whose taste had been often appealed to—but he would only assist a friend or two—was considered perfect, and his "get-up" was looked at with the sort of admiring despair which might have attended the clothing of the late

Alfred d'Orsay. Even the tailor had been influenced by his man-of-the-world manner, and had altered again and again, quite awe-struck. With the rest, he dealt as though he were measuring a company of soldiers for contract articles.

There was great bustle, and a flutter that was delightful. The rustle of the Doctor's gown was heard down the passages, like the flapping of a mainsail. They were busy putting the last touches to the exhibition-room, where the strangers were to be received.

Mrs. Wheeler, from off whose mind the linen, socks, &c., might now fairly be said to be lifted, was still not at peace, having the jellies, creams, &c., substituted.

The lunch was laid out in the "great refectory" (W. Freeman, Esq.'s, fine drawing-room, joined to the study by knocking down the party-wall), and was a splendid spectacle.

The time had arrived, and some one, looking out from a top window, came rushing down with the news that a carriage was coming over the hill with a gig behind it. Every one was ordered to his post—Mr. Whitty at the door to receive strangers and show the way; the Doctor, in his gown, in the drawing-room; Mrs. Wheeler, by her own particular desire, and without any objection on the Doctor's part, was excused from meeting company. Besides, she had a sort of presentiment that unless she watched over the delicacies she had prepared, to *the very last moment*, there was no guarding against some sudden crash or cataclasm, which might overwhelm the whole in some indistinct shape of ruin. Perhaps too she suspected that the unlicensed soldiery of the place, now about to receive their discharge, might take advantage of her absence, and sack the place.

The first carriage had come. Mr. Bowman and Lady Margaret, with their little son Alfred. These august persons were received with much agitation by Mr. Whitty, who felt himself much more at home in dealing with boys than with ladies and gentlemen. Mr. Bowman was a tall bluff-looking, good-humoured gentleman; and his lady a

fair-haired, fashionable-looking woman, well-dressed, and very stout. She was elaborately courteous to the usher. The doctor came forward to meet them with his hand out, and his head swinging and swaying as he walked, and a 'How do you do, sir?' and with deep obeisance, "How do you do, my Lady Margaret?" Then added: "And so this is Master Alfred, who is to come to us by-and-by; by-and-by to become a great scholar, and at the same time a perfect gentleman." And with this indirect advertisement of what was the special feature of his school, the Doctor laid his hand on "Master" Alfred's head in an episcopal manner, to the young gentleman's great alarm. More strangers began to pour in, worthy local people—of poor degree, as compared with Mr. and Lady Margaret Bowman—and who were quietly "waved" over to Mr. Whitty, while the Doctor resumed his interrupted worship of his august guests. Lady Margaret had a hearty air of interest in all about her, that quite charmed strangers; titular friends, or "people that knew her long," which was her idea of friends, remarked that this was intermittent; others called it *bonhomie*. Thus she would lay her hand on the Doctor's wrist, with a "Now tell me this, Doctor"—and "Be so good," &c.—or, "Now I have laid this out, Doctor Wheeler; you must come over for a day to Bowman House—you must now. St. John, I want him to come to us," &c.

But another scout had come running down from an eerie in the roof—not unlike a railway guard's look-out tower in a train—with news that an open carriage and four greys were coming over the hill, and that two gentlemen and a girl were sitting in it.

"That's Squire Gay," said Lugard, the colour coming into his cheeks; "and my governor, and Miss Diana. By Jove! it's coming close. I say, Bligh, how d'ye feel about the debate? Mind you give me good cues, and don't interrupt me. For I intend to pour out eloquence, I can tell you."

"But you'll give me a chance too; that's only fair."

"Oh, you! Why, you're to stick to the dry facts of the

argument ; that's your line,—at least you always told me so."

The large drawing-room was crowded and a kind of Babel going on, when Mr. Whitty came nervously leading the way before the new party which had arrived in the open carriage. This was a tall fresh-looking gentleman of about fifty, very bald, and with great sandy whiskers, fresh and modern in his dress, and looking so clean and bright that he seemed as if he had just stepped from a bath. He was full of life and action, and had a way of throwing back his head to laugh at the end of a sentence. And one of those loud engaging laughs, finishing a remark to Mr. Whitty, made all the room look round at them, that is, at the young girl who leant upon his arm, and who was gazing round at every one with a smile of surprise and half-delight.

The description of Lugard was very faithful. She had that delicately-refined look which he had described as "trinket-like." She was not short, though she was "small" in size ; a very pale skin, a delicately-cut face, small nose, and a long expressive mouth, black hair and eyes. Two little curls (belonging to a fashion now extinct) were on her cheeks ; but in her eyes, dancing with that air of roguish surprise and inquiry noticed as she first entered, was all her charm. She had a tiny gauzy bonnet on, and a great many gold ornaments—earrings, locket, &c.—about her ; in which it was plain she took great delight. So entered Miss Diana Gay, upon her father's arm. Those near them, gazing stupidly, as is the manner of country people, saw him jerk down his head, almost into her face, and ask with affection, "What do you think, Doatsey?"

Behind them came a gentlemanly-looking man, almost dandified in his dress, of over fifty, but appearing, by the help of great care and lenitives, no more than about forty. He had glossy hair, a little thin ; a small tufted imperial, and a genteel unhealthiness in the colour of his skin ; his clothes were of a juvenile cut, and he had a soft sweet smile, which he put on exactly at the moment he fixed his

glass in his eye, the two motions always going together. This was Richard Lugard's father.

He was whispering pleasantly to Miss Diana, who then gave a merry laugh at what he said; for this young lady was so full of enjoyment in the pleasant gifts of this world, nay, in the very sense of mere living and seeing, and looking and listening, that this laugh of delight was quite a characteristic of hers: the crowd, the oddity of the scene, as it were, quite amused her. But in another moment there was a rustle, a flapping, as of cordage and canvas, and Lady Margaret Bowman had borne down on her, coming alongside like a great argosy, and had carried away that light craft with her into port beside her on a chair, where she had much to say to her.

"When did you come back, my dear? You must tell me all about it; and fix a day to come down to us at Bowman House. We must have you there, and no excuse—"

And with great rustling of ribbons and silks and shawl, Lady Margaret turned her chair so as to face the young girl beside her, and have a good "purchase" as it were for conversation, much as doctors sit before the patient when getting ready the stethoscope.

More were coming in now, mainly good local people—Doctor Windle, the clergyman, and all the "swells" were arrived; the local apothecary, the county doctor, an honest gentleman-farmer or two, the dancing-master, &c., were all agreeably punctual. For to such the notion of the substantial lunch was very acceptable. And now Mr. Whitty appearing, and whispering nervously to the Doctor, that gentleman roused, and, rubbing his hands softly, turned to his neighbours and said—

"I believe they are quite ready in the exhibition-room. What do you say;—shall we, Lady Margaret?"

With great rustling, Lady Margaret rose and took his arm; Doctor Windle smiling, as though he were doing something funny, offered his arm to Miss Diana Gay, who laughed herself at the notion that all the sport was now at last to begin. The Doctor thought it was at his wit. The rest fell into a sort of procession—the stout farming

gentlemen, great county doctor, and others following behind, "taking each other in;" thinking a little ruefully of the long probation to intervene between that time and lunch.

The "exhibeetion" room was an addition which the Doctor had built out at the back of W. Freeman, Esq.'s, mansion, and which necessarily spread over a pet parterre in which Mrs. Freeman had taken great pride. It was a long and spacious apartment, with a daïs at one end, some scarlet hangings, and even a gilt chair or two—arrangements, as the *Calthorpe Mercury* remarked a few days later, reflected great credit on the taste of Messrs. Higginbotham, "the eminent upholsterers of our city." The seventy were all clustered at the other end on raised seats, and stood up while the august procession entered. At the same moment the select "orchestra" of the house, led by Mr. Jennings, consisting of piano (*a quatre mains*), flute (Master Halliday), cornet, and violin (Gill), struck up the well-known and inspiring march from *Norma*. And at the same moment the best-dressed youth of the place, one who was noted for his address and off-hand, man-of-the-world manner, came forward boldly, and went round distributing programmes. How the ladies admired the easy natural way he did this!

"Look at my lad coming," said Mr. Lugard rather loud, for he had to speak against the march in *Norma*. "I declare he looks very well."

"Where, where?" said Diana eagerly and in great excitement, for she was delighted with the spectacle. "Oh, there he is! Will he come this way?"

"I dare say he will notice his own father, Miss Diana," said Mr. Lugard sweetly; "or perhaps cut me."

"I say, how your Dick is grown!" said Mr. Gay; why, he is a strapping grenadier! I say, Lugard," he added, stooping over, "he is the top one here, evidently—rules 'em all; their best man, eh?"

"Isn't he to get all the prizes?" said Diana, her eyes dancing.

"That he is," said Mr. Gay hastily; "unreasonable,



greedy lad ; and leave nothing for the other poor fellows. —Here, Dick, how are you, my man ? ”

Dick, bright, handsome, resplendent in his new clothes, with a sudden colour in his cheeks, was certainly a fine fellow to look at. That colour deepened as he came up to Diana, and small white fingers, covered with rings, were put out hastily.

“ How do you do, Mr. Richard ? ”

His larger hand was encumbered with the programmes, and in his eagerness to meet the small jewelled hand, the heap of papers fell, and fluttered over the floor. Diana laughed, and almost clapped her hands at this “ bit of fun,” then grew grave and very serious on a sudden, as if it was unbecoming to laugh at a misfortune. Already many eyes from the raised seats were turned wistfully to this enchanting creature—really most like the angels in the pantomime—their most perfect idea of all that was celestial. Certain young hearts ached for some days afterwards ; and two or three unhappy wights, who had “ guardians ” too busy to receive them at home, had, in addition to their private troubles, to endure the pangs of “ hopeless love.”

“ How many medals are you to sweep off, eh, Dick ? ” said Mr. Gay heartily ; “ leave something to the other poor devils. Sure of the general-merit I’m told ; large silver medal—no less—and ten pounds money. Very handsome of the Doctor.”

“ You will give me some of your winnings, Mr. Richard,” said the young girl eagerly, “ for a bazaar—a charity ? ”

“ As much as you like—all of it,” said Dick, promptly ; “ it would be a great honour if you would take it.”

“ No, no, no ! ” said she, delighted at this homage. “ I will say—let me see, now—ten shillings.”

“ Tell me, Dick, how’s our friend Bligh ? I don’t see him.”

“ Oh, he’s here, sir ! ” said Dick, looking round ; “ working as hard as ever.—You remember Bob Bligh, Miss Gay ? ”

“ Oh dear, yes,” she said with a little toss ; “ indeed I do. He’s very good, isn’t he ? ”

Mr. Lugard, the father, laughed very heartily at this, and said Miss Diana had picked up sarcasm abroad, which he

was uncommonly sorry to see. To hit at that poor boy in such a way was not *fair*—really not. On which Miss Diana grew grave and half-serious ; then, looking sideways from the corners of her glistening eyes, laughed a laugh of roguish inquiry ; which sort of change from penitence to gaiety was a motion very habitual with her, and, indeed, one of her most piquant and dramatic changes.

“Will he get anything ? I hope he’ll get something,” she said earnestly ; “he does work so hard. And that poor good soul at home—his old mamma, who feels such a pride in any little book or honour he brings back.”

“Oh, I know he’ll do very fairly,” said Dick, handsomely standing up for his friend. “I’m sure of it, indeed : at least, quite sufficient to please her. But what I get—that is, the medal and all that”—he added, dropping his voice,—“it would be such an addition if *you* were to give it—it would double the honour.”

Mr. Gay overheard some of this.

“All right, Dick, my lad ; leave it to me ; I’ll manage it with the Doctor.”

The march in *Norma* was done—executed, said the *Mercury*, “with a rare instinct and spirit, that would have done credit to a professional orchestra.” There was a silence, and little Brown advanced out into the middle, made a bow, and began the Prologue. “A little thing I put together for him,” whispers the Doctor to Lady Margaret ; “just anything to lead off.” But Mr. Whitty had, in truth, had all the labour of this composition—the “putting together” being simply a few general remarks on the part of the Doctor. “See, Mr. Whitty, some nice compliment to the company—glad to see familiar faces ; had been boys themselves once ; this old place. I just give you the ideas.” Accordingly, amid profound silence, the young Master Brown began—

“Kind friends, we greet you once again ;  
A year has gone, but not in vain.”

And his arm went up and down harmoniously, according

to the rules in Mr. Enfield's "Speaker." And after dwelling on the delights of the place, and their anguish at parting from what he called "these 'appy 'alls"—a pronunciation that made Miss Diana put down her head behind her fan—he retired amid loud applause. Then two young gentlemen came with books—led up by Mr. Whitty, who had to think of everything on this momentous day. At one of these Miss Diana looked eagerly as he drew near. There was nothing fashionable or elegant in the cut of his clothes, which were a good serviceable shooting-coat, roughly made, and which looked a little ill-fitting on his broad, square-made shoulders. The young girl had an amused, downcast look as he came up, and she put her hand out with a half-shy, half-patronizing air.

"How do you do, Mr. Bligh?" she said. "Are they going to torture you?" And she gave a laugh of delight at the notion.

The other was not confused as Lugard had been. His calm full eyes looked at her, opening as they did so with inquiry, as though she was quite serious.

"Torture me—no!" he said. "I think I know this Horace pretty well."

"Horace!" said Mr. Lugard, turning over the leaves.

"I declare, Dr. Wheeler, this is most unfair. My college learning is all rusty.—What do you say, Miss Diana? I don't know how to examine, really."

"Oh, give him a difficult bit," said Miss Diana, excitedly; "we really must puzzle him."

"Would you be kind enough," said Mr. Lugard, in the dolitest tone of courtesy, and raising his voice so as to be heard by all, "to turn to the ode in the Second Book:—

*'Æquam memento rebus in arduis.'?*"

Robert immediately began to read sonorously and firmly, declaiming the Horatian measure in good tones; then translated fluently and correctly, and with a confident air that showed he knew his business.

"Stay, stay, stay!" said Mr. Lugard; "not so fast, sir. What did you give for '*interiore nota Falerni*'?"

"With Falernian from the inner cellar, sir."

Mr. Lugard looked up at a little cupola in the ceiling, and shook his head slowly and sadly.

"Inner cellar! Where do you get that? where is cellar?"

"Oh, there's no cellar, sir," said Bob calmly.

"There's no cellar; well, don't let us have one, then, Not that I object to one—a good one."

There was a loud roar from the benches at this joke.

"Be good enough to take the words separately. What's '*nota*'? What's '*interiore*'? What's '*Falerni*'?"

Bligh did so at once. "That, sir, conveys no meaning, as you see. Wine of an inner mark. But as the oldest wine was always put in the farthest bin, which was further inside, it becomes impossible to do without cellar or bin. Besides, all the commentators agree in it."

There was such an air of quiet knowledge in the way this explanation was given that Miss Diana looked very grave and serious, as though here was a matter not to be treated with levity.

Mr. Lugard said, "No doubt so; possibly so. Where was Horace born, sir?"

He was told, as also many other matters which he inquired about. In truth, he did not feel very comfortable, as the eye of the Oxford man was on him.

"Very well, indeed," he said; "Mr. Bligh, you have answered very creditably."

Then came a scene from Molière between two of the young gentlemen; then a Latin poem by Mr. Whitty, though it was "put together" by the Doctor, on the same principle as the Prologue. And then we should have seen Dick Lugard step out into the middle, as into an arena, and as if he was throwing down his glove, start off impetuously into the debate on the point "Whether Cæsar or Napoleon was the greater man?" Bligh sitting at the other side of the round table covered with green baize, and watching him calmly. The father regarded him with a simpering air.

"Richard will get his head now. I think we shall hear something lively. This is his line, you know."

"Oh, I hope so!" said Miss Diana; "I am dying to hear."

"I don't think our friend on the other side of the baize will make much of Dick. Listen to him!"

"He'll astonish them by-and-by in the House," said Mr. Gay.

"I am surprised," said Dick, with flashing eyes, "to hear such sentiments from my honourable friend. What can he be dreaming of? Put Cæsar beside Napoleon—that brilliant genius that could write, speak, fight, plan, do everything,—beside a mere rude fighting man! The conqueror of the world beside the mere subjugator of a province, who lived in days when the world was young and unkempt, when the forests were unhewn, when the hearts were savage!"

"I am sorry to interrupt," said Bligh, rising; "but what does all this mean? Surely my friend must know that Cæsar could write, speak, think, sleep, almost at the same time. The conqueror of a province! Where is my friend's history? Does he not know that Cæsar over-ran Britain, France, Germany, what not? I ask him, what province does he mean?"

This was so unexpected, so sudden a "pull-up" in the midst of his tide of eloquence, that Lugard was disconcerted, and looked wondering at his opponent.

"This will be interesting in a moment," said the Doctor, smiling to Lady Margaret. "These two lads are the flower of our little fold."

Dick resumed in a moment more calmly, but presently warmed up into generalities, and was again stopped.

"Now, Mr. Chairman," said he, as Bligh rose quietly, "I must protest against being interrupted in this way. I will not have it! What d'ye mean?" he said, under his breath across the table, with flashing eyes.

"Just as you please," said Bligh, smiling and sitting down; "only I appeal to every one, if he did not put the battle of Austerlitz six years too late?"

There was a titter ; and the flashing eyes of Richard Lugard saw Miss Diana's brilliant face quickening with enjoyment at the scene, and anxiously and eagerly looking for more. Then his lip curled with scorn. His fine periods and dashing eloquence to be interrupted by those wretched, *mean*, pettifogging quibbles ! But he also saw his father's simpering face growing bitter, and "twisted" with displeasure. Altogether he was put out, confused, disgusted, and he flung himself into a chair at last, with his teeth set, and determined to pay off that fellow with the schoolmaster soul in the same way. He would keep a watch on him.

But Bligh went on his way steadily, learned, full of his subject,—for it was a pet one with him,—and in a dry vein of sarcasm. He was specially pleasant on the putting forward of the battle of Austerlitz ; and then gave a picture of Cæsar as he really was, so full of detail, so copious, and convincing that every one there saw at once how little Mr. Richard Lugard could have known of the matter, to have been so fluent and so flippant. The best part of the whole exhibition was Bligh's earnestness, his calm quiet purpose of vindicating his hero on public grounds only, and with very little reference to Lugard. This made his advocacy more natural and valuable. And all the strangers nodded to each other and said, "Upon my word, there's a shrewd, knowing fellow." "No catching him." "He'll do, I can tell you ;" with more such prophecy.

Watching him with eager eye and scornful lip, Lugard waited for his turn, and then tried a rally. But he could not retrieve himself—he had the sense of failure over him. His grand periods could not supply him with facts, and he was afraid of more blunders, for which his opponent was watching with searching eye. The strangers said, "Plenty of talk in that fellow, but not overmuch ballast, I should say."

The debate on Cæsar and Napoleon at last ended. When the two had got down among their fellows, and Lugard heard the encouraging "Well done, old Bligh !"

addressed to his companion, he turned round on him quickly, and with bitter reproach said, "I don't call it well done; I call it shabby and tricky."

"Shabby and tricky!" said Bligh, with wonder and pain in his face. "How?"

"Every how! It was an unfair plant and a trap. You had made yourself up in all that, and thought you would have a pull on me."

"As I live, nothing of the kind; there were half a dozen others would have done as well. On my solemn word of honour, I spoke so, because I thought it would show you off; and so it did. Why, it seemed to me it was so spirited, and went off so well."

"Oh, you're deep enough, wise Mr. Bligh!" said the other; "who knows what other surprises you have on hand? Why, I dare say,"—and Lugard, stopping suddenly, looked at him with a look of dislike and alarm,—  
"but if you thought of *that*—"

"What do you mean?" said Bligh, with the most perfect unconsciousness of his meaning.

But now the "band" was commencing the "Prospect-House Waltzes, composed and respectfully dedicated to the Rev. Doctor Wheeler"—it must be said very inappropriately—"by his obliged and humble servant, Henry Jennings, Professor of Music to Prospect-House Academy." This interrupted the talk of the two youths. But up at the distinguished end, Mr. Lugard's face wore the same "put-out" and angry air, which contrasted oddly with the smile he would put on and fit into his mouth—like his glass. "What was over the man to-day, floundering that way? think the other had an unfair pull over him; and I should say a very clerk-like sort of mind."

"Oh yes," said Diana, "poor Richard; it was very hard. But the other," she added wisely, with the popular respect for erudition, "he seemed to know such an immense deal!"



## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PRIZES.

**B**UT now there was a flutter going on in the crowd, and eager restlessness,—the “spouting” was finished. Mr. Whitty was seen rushing to and fro, whispering to the Doctor, then spurring off on missions, like an aide-de-camp at a review. A round table covered with a scarlet cloth, on which were some richly-bound books, a blue morocco case, and a large porte-monnaie, ostentatiously displayed, was wheeled forward to the front.

“Well, I think so, Mr. Whitty,” said the Doctor; “it is about time.—Lady Margaret,” he said plaintively, “would you honour these young gentlemen by presenting them with their premiums? How good of you!—Now, Mr. Whitty, if you please.”

And that gentleman, with a large portfolio in his hand, went out into the middle—a signal for the whole house to stand upon its feet, and relieve its feelings by a cheer.

“This has been the custom from time eemmemorial,” said the Doctor, explaining to Lady Margaret—that is, from the fifteen or twenty years during which the school had been established.

“Then Mr. Whitty began to read out the list, beginning with the lowest class.

As each name was called, there was a rustle and commotion in the ranks afar off, and some little fellow, sturdy,



blushing, his eyes dancing in his head, would come tramping up, with eyes of encouragement and even amusement bent on him, as he clutched from Lady Margaret's aristocratic hands the gorgeous red-and-gold book which made him happy. Then a cheer broke out, sometimes merely conventional; but when Charley or Johnny was popular, or had come up a second or third time, given forth with double animation. As the sun shines in brilliantly, and lights up those joyous faces, whose very hearts are seen through their eyes, some of the grown-up people sitting there wander back in thought to some such scene twenty or thirty years before, and think of the delightful summer morning, and the pure unsophisticated joy and exultation they felt then, when the strangers sitting there and listening seemed like delegates from the nations—sovereign princes—as though the great world were looking on; and they themselves walk up in that delicious progress, feel the medal put about their necks, and hear slow and kindly words of praise and encouragement from some venerable guest of distinction, though their eyes are too dim with excitement and joy to see his face. They hear the great shout of approbation from their fellows—those *dear*, kind fellows;—and they think, a little sadly, that no triumph since earned has ever brought them a tittle of the swelling delight and glory of that hour.

The little procession went on; Mr. Whitty declaring honours and titles sonorously, which the Doctor chose should run in Latin, as the Doctor explained to Lady Margaret:

“It gives a classical turn to their minds, and teaches them to aim-mew-late the 'chievements of Rome and Greece. The first we call *imperator*, the second *prætor*, the third *consul*, and so on—so on. By the way, Lady Margaret, I am greatly disappointed about a little matter—especially as our friend Mr. Lugard has come over expressly. But the Oxford gentlemen, it seems, say—” and the Doctor dropped his voice into a whisper.

They were now at the last and highest class.

"Now for a general sweep," said Mr. Gay cheerfully. "Look out, Lugard."

Miss Diana turned restlessly to Mr. Gay: "Don't forget, papa—you promised me."

"To be sure, duck; I forgot it.—Doctor Wheeler, I say, as my Di and Dick yonder are in the same parish, why, I think it would look nice if she presented him with the medal and the what-d'ye-call-it."

An expression of embarrassment came into the Doctor's face.

"Why, my dear sir, I am so distressed; but really—" and he dropped his voice into a whisper.

"My goodness! you don't tell me so!"

Mr. Whitty meanwhile was proclaiming—

"French: Construing, Composition in verse and prose—Robert Bligh."

And to the usual salvo of applause he advanced up calmly and leisurely, received his book from Lady Margaret, and made that lady a low bow. As he turned to go, he saw Diana smiling and laughing with pleasure, and made her a bow also.

Far down at the other end Dick Lugard, panting, now grown doubtful and suspicious, saw him return.

"Catechism and Morals," again proclaimed Mr. Whitty—"Robert Bligh."

Robert, standing by Lugard, heard him give an impatient stamp; yet these were the poor prizes which Lugard would have thought beneath him, and which fell almost as of course to Bligh. But it was adding to the accumulating triumphs. Never mind, the next would redeem all.

Lugard turned very pale as Mr. Whitty began to read. Looking to the end of the room, he saw a little seriousness on Miss Diana's face. It was coming now.

"General merit: the large silver medal, with ten pounds in specie—*Imperator*"—and Mr. Whitty paused a second—"Robertus Bligh."

There was silence for a moment from surprise; then from the fickle crowd rang out a tremendous cheer. Bligh

bewildered, really confounded with delight and genuine astonishment, remained immovable ; for he had heard a deep groan come from one who was beside him.

"Oh, Dick," he said hurriedly, "I never thought this. I did not, indeed."

He went up, the applause continuing—some clapping their hands into his face ; Mr. Whitty smiling with excitement ; every eye bent on him and enjoying the spectacle. Alas ! such moments are all the victor's—the triumph is displayed without any regard for the feelings of the vanquished.

"Here he comes," said Mr. Gay, sharing in this feeling, "I declare !—Well done, my boy !—Doctor, I think if my Di were to give it to him—"

"Oh ! Certainly. Lady Margaret will excuse."

That delicate and refined face was all a-glow with agitation at this publicity. Mr. Whitty came with the prize. She had nearly let fall the great medal and its ribbon. Here was the ten-pound banknote, new, crisp, and clean, all but fluttering away. She was laughing over the importance of the duty.

"What am I to do?" she said. "Oh, tell me !"

Oh for poor Dick, afar off, seeing his rival going down on one knee, and the brilliant young lady stooping over to put the ribbon round his neck ! Then Mr. Jennings and the "orchestra"—a little courtesy surely at such a season, for they meant well, and did their best—struck up "See the conquering hero," not very much out of tune.

No one thought of Dick ; perhaps not even Miss Diana ; for with every one success succeeds, and makes us all brave, handsome, and interesting. But hush for one moment. One of the Oxford gentlemen wishes "to say a word"—namely, that the answering for this prize has been very good ; and that the second in merit, Mr. Lugard, had done very fairly also ; and that therefore they had adjudged him "a copy of Macaulay's 'Essays.'" But no one came up to receive this *solatium*, and Diana, with some trepidation, saw her friend Dick tramping hastily from the hall.

"No matter," said the Doctor plaintively; "Mr. Whitty will take care of it for him."

Then the "band"—we must be complimentary to the end—struck up our familiar National Anthem, which even the Doctor, though he had no ear, knew by the *shape*.

Out in the garden, groaning aloud and half out of his wits, Lugard was pacing furiously round. He did not know where he was going, what he was doing. "My God! I'm disgraced!" he was saying: "ruined before them all! What am I to do?—Oh what *shall* I do? What is to become of me?"

He heard a step and looked round; then drew himself up.

"Oh, Lugard, this is dreadful! I never expected it—I never intended it, I call Heaven to witness—"

"You should be proud of yourself—you planned it finely," said the other, breathing hard. "Don't be alarmed; I wouldn't *touch* you. You mean, unworthy fellow, to throw me off my guard and creep in before me in that way!"

"I didn't, I didn't," repeated Bligh distractedly. "I tell you I did not. I thought I had no chance; but I worked hard, just as I have always done, for the spirit of the thing, to come in after you, and learn as much as I could; or indeed, thinking there might be some chance—"

"Yes, I understand," said the other, looking at him wildly. "You are at no loss for reasons. What do I care for your reasons! You have undone me, disgraced me before them all—before my father and before her, the girl I was foolishly telling you of last night. I'll never forgive it to you, never! Not if I was to grow up and live a hundred years. If I had a medal round my neck, and got it the way you did, I'd take it off. No honest fellow but would be ashamed to wear such a thing. Your medal and your money, indeed! I don't envy you. I wouldn't take them and your mean heart together."

Yet his trembling voice and wistful glance at the decoration contradicted this speech, and showed how he envied the happy winner of those honours.

Bligh was changing colour at the continuance of this personal language.

"I say," he said, "you do me injustice, Lugard. You should know me better than to charge me with such a thing. From any other fellow in the school I could not bear what I have heard from you to-day. It is not fair of you—indeed it is not."

"What!" said Lugard, his eyes lighting up with a sort of joy. "Do you suppose I want any privilege or protection beyond the other fellows? *Indeed* I do not. Pray get that notion out of your head, sir. I can answer for my words as well as another, and can stand by them, and back them up too. So if you think yourself aggrieved—"

"Aggrieved!" said the other, looking at him sadly with his clear open blue eye. "No."

"Ah, I thought not," said Lugard, with a loud laugh of scorn.

"You can hardly be serious, Lugard," Bligh said in the same tone. "Think what would be said of *you* if anything of *that* sort took place between us, and what motives would be imputed to you. I care for your honour too much, Lugard, to let any provocation help you into such a mistake."

"This is outrageous!" said the other, walking backwards and forwards in a fury. "Oh, what *am* I to do with this fellow?"

Bligh laid his hand on Lugard's arm and pressed it kindly.

"See, Lugard," he said. "The other fellows would laugh at me if I told them what I am going to tell you. I had a motive which made me work this time, and about three weeks ago, made me labour to try"—here he hesitated—"and beat you. I confess it."

"Oh, it's coming now, is it?" said Lugard. "So what you said before was not quite—" "I'll tell you all. At

home I have a poor mother who lives by herself all the year nearly, and all that time lives, I may say, for me. I do not think she enjoys or cares for life in the least, except to keep herself alive for the day when I shall rise in the world. Well, only a month before she wrote to me, saying that she was beginning to be disappointed after all, and she feared she should not live to see her heart comforted by any success of mine. And I was so ashamed, Lugard, and felt so what she meant, that I set to work, and got up earlier, and sat up a little later, and so far took that advantage. Otherwise you would have been sure to have it as before."

Lugard broke out with a loud and mocking laugh.

"So now it's out! So you must introduce our old mammas on the scene. All to oblige her—poor old lady!"

Bligh turned quickly on him.

"Don't speak in that way," he said; "it's not fair nor gentlemanly. I see I made a mistake in telling you. But it is not generous in you to—to—"

"To bring in an old lady and get behind her petticoat," said Lugard, sneering. "So we did it to get a prize for its mammy!"

"I told you before not to speak in that way," said Bligh, with a voice that trembled in its turn; "so let it drop, I advise you. I got the medal because I worked for it and won it fairly, and others couldn't; so that's all about it."

He was turning away; but this tone had stung Lugard, and he called out—

"Well, go home, and mammy will show it to all the visitors—poor old soul!—and cry for joy over her clever darling."

"Stop that!" said the other calmly, and coming back to him. "I told you before—"

"Don't give *me* any orders!" said the other in a tone of fury. "I'll take none from you, and I'll say what I please."

"Not about her. You are welcome to me."

“What ! must we reverence the old mammy ?”

In a second feet were shuffling and scrambling on the gravel,—two flushed faces flashing forward and backward, and arms whirling excitedly. Dick had now forgotten everything—defeat, mortification, everything. Here was an opportunity ; and on honourable terms he would have some sort of indemnification. And yet the same quality which served Robert intellectually, served him now. He did indeed feel a burning rage, mixed with grief, to think his friend could have been so ungenerous. And that insult to one he so loved made him forget all else. Down came his enemy's blows fast and furious. After the delightful holiday of the morning, was all going to end in this ! At that moment the galleries of the house were re-echoing to the thundering of heavy shoes ; delighted wearers rushing along, shouting with joy, to get their things ; for the carriages were waiting below. And here, at the back of the house, were two boys, with all the deadly and unholy passions which fighting rouses, striving to mark, maim, or even kill each other. They did not hear a light step on the gravel. The calm and wary Bligh had at last found the opening he waited for, and one of his strong blows had descended full on the fair cheek-bone of Lugard. By-and-by that would become a “black eye,” fatally proclaiming the story of *another defeat* ; and this thought lent a frantic fury to his blows. But a scream of terror interrupted both. Reluctantly stopping and glaring round, Lugard saw the slight figure of Miss Diana Gay, with her bright face filled with terror, and her hands clasped, beside them. Covered with dust, with faces scarlet (and Lugard's already swelling up angrily), the combatants' arms dropped, and their heads hung down.

“Oh, what are you doing ?” cried the young lady distractedly. “What a dreadful thing this is ! You want to kill each other ! Oh, what shall I do ? Will no one come ?” She was quite scared, as she might have been by the sight of real wounds and blood. Then, more distracted, “What a dreadful thing !” she went on. “Will no one come ?”

Bligh, always collected, went up to her. "It is over ; indeed it is, Miss Gay. I am ashamed of myself ; I am, indeed." Miss Diana drew back a little. Oh for poor Dick ! at that moment held back by the consciousness of the tingling swelling, and the worse consciousness of being detected in what must seem this humiliating attempt to revenge his intellectual defeat by this appeal to brute violence. "It was a mistake, indeed it was," said Bligh, feeling acutely for him ; "and it was all *about something else* than what you know.—Lugard," he said, "we have been very hasty, and I took you up too hastily. Come, make it up before Miss Gay. Do !"

Miss Diana, beside herself with excitement, felt herself quite a little heroine at the moment. The glory of reconciling the two heroes flashed on her mind. Bligh's hand was out, but Dick remained passive.

"This must all end," she said. "And oh, you will for ever oblige me, if you will be friends, and not let the matter go farther." She had heard her father use this phrase to gentlemen. "Oh, promise, if you would ever wish to oblige me. It is dreadful to see this going on." And, approaching Dick softly, she looked into his face with a winning expression, timidly ; then, with sudden motion, half mischievous, half kindly, she darted over, seized upon his hand, and, placing it quickly in Bligh's, said, "Now I insist ; you must be dear friends again."

"Never !" said Lugard, drawing his away.

The young lady coloured. She drew herself up. "Indeed you must. I ask you."

"With all my heart," said Bligh warmly ; "and I own I was a little wrong."

"Yes," said Lugard, "you are going to be generous and noble now. We can leave the thing as it is. We want no heroics. I am not offended, only I must say, of all the—"

"It's no matter, then," she said coldly. "Do as you like, Mr. Richard Lugard. No other lady would have been refused such a thing—Mr. Bligh, would you take me to my father ?"



She turned away. Robert Bligh went with her. Then Lugard called out—a little ungraciously in tone, it must be said ; but only think what a storm was raging in that schoolboy's heart—"Well, then, there, since you wish it—but—"

The other seized it eagerly.

"My dear Lugard, I am sorry all this has happened. But—but I'll only make it worse if I say anything."

The little lady looked on triumphantly. This was *her* handiwork. She felt herself a little peacemaker ; it seemed as if she had hindered some dreadful scene of bloodshed. She seemed to discover in herself immense diplomatic gifts.

"Now listen to me," she went on wisely. "Some one will be coming, I know. Now that you are friends again, and that I have made you so, you may depend on me. I shall be as silent as the grave on this dreadful business. No one shall ever know it except us three. There you promise me?"

And having made this really diplomatic declaration,—the best that could be given under the circumstances,—she looked on her work in triumph. And yet poor Richard, if we only consider his position—under *any* attitude how humiliating!—nothing that could be done for him could repair it.

"Where on earth is she? Where is my little lady?"

"Hush, hush! Now, mind," said Diana.

"Ah! so here she is, with the gentlemen. Nice work," said Mr. Gay. "We've been hunting for you everywhere, boys. Come, what are you about here? We can't have Cæsar and Napoleon going on in this way. I want you both to fix a day to come and stay at Gay Court." Later Mr. Gay said he saw the whole business,—Dick's coming black eye, &c,—but was discreetly silent.

"I am sorry I cannot go to you, sir," said Dick, shortly, breathing fast. "I have to be with my father."

"But your father agrees. There's the thing, you see."

"He can do as he likes," said Dick, bluntly. "I can't

go. I am not in spirits. I want to go somewhere—anywhere.”

“Oh, nonsense, my dear boy! What humbug! A clever, brilliant chap like you—”

“Clever—brilliant! Oh, very!” repeated Dick, scornfully.

“Why, you know you have twice the genius of our friend here! He won’t be angry with me for saying so. But you have; you know you have.”

“Indeed he has,” said Bligh earnestly.

“Oh yes, yes,” said Miss Diana, with enthusiasm.

Mr. Gay walked a little on with Bligh, taking his arm, and calling him “my gallant *imperator*.” Oh, the cruel world!

“Our friend is a little down, you know,—it’s most natural. Who can blame him? Between ourselves,” he added confidentially, “I want our little lady there to give him some comfort. She knows how, I can tell you. So, Master Bligh, you have had to stand up and do a bit of pugilism to hold your medal, eh? Well, well; boys are queer fellows.”

The way in which Diana comforted the defeated hero was this: “Oh, I am sorry for you, Mr. Richard; I feel for you, I do indeed.”

“It is very good of you,” said Richard gloomily; “and does me too much honour. But I don’t care about anything now. Feel for me! Yes, you have a contempt for me! You must have it; I know it. Beaten in every way!”

He said this so forcibly that Miss Diana, who had not dreamt of such a thing, began to doubt whether she should not entertain some such thought. Perhaps, it is even a little impolitic, to try and convince people of our own humiliation; very little argument is sure to do it.

Diana knew not what to say next; she was not ready. In serious and grave crises she was only good for a few seconds, where dramatic action was wanting. Then she got a little aground. Suddenly she called out in alarm, “Oh, oh, how dreadful!” Her eye had fallen for the

first time on the swelling, growing more hot and fierce every moment, changing from pale pink to deeper purple. "What is that shocking thing?" she said, retreating from him. "Oh, how dreadful! Why did you let that be done to you?"

Worse and worse humiliation. Poor Dick looked at her steadily with trembling lips. The speech was in the kindest tone; but it showed what was behind. There was a dancing light, of buoyancy of heart, and perhaps mischief, in Miss Diana's eyes. She came on the earth merely to have to do with the sun, and the flowers, and the colours, and all the delightful things. And this Dick saw in a moment, and with an abrupt turn he walked away.

The young girl was scared.

"Oh, come back," she said, "I am so sorry—indeed I am. And I so feel it; and I know you will beat him another time."

But Dick never looked round. Miss Diana tossed her head, and glanced over to the other side of the garden, where her father was walking with his arm in the arm of the conqueror. On the neck of the conqueror the blue ribbon was glistening in the sun. After all, maundering with beaten people who are "down"—proverbially a selfish class—is dreary work: to not being successful, the next best thing is to be with the successful. And so Miss Diana walked over to join them.

Presently all the carriages were going away; there were whole strings of them drawn up. Trunks were being carried downstairs. Delighted and exultant boys were bounding up and down to fetch some last articles of property, for the parents and guardians were waiting. The Doctor was standing, with a tender and pathetic face, out on the steps, and saying, "God bless you, Edward!" or "Weelium!" I don't know how many times over. And from every carriage as it drove away came a cheer.



## CHAPTER V.

### GAY COURT.

**ON** the Calthorpe Road there was a handsome red-brick archway, well covered with ivy, with a good sweep in front, and a semi-circular wall with pillars and chains. To the traveller passing by, and thinking of his dull inn and coffee-room at Calthorpe, the next town, the glimpse through the great gate of the fair open meadows, the noble trees scattered about, and the patch of the mansion itself afar off, nestling in a warm clump, and, like a Spanish beauty, lifting the corner of her veil to show a little of her face, such glimpse gives the best sensation of luxury and enjoyable pleasure—beyond even the solemn grandeurs of a palace. Every one passing Gay Court had this thought in his mind : “What a fine place it was !” and the flyman always said, “It well might be, for there was lots o’ money to back it ; and all this here a both sides of the road, as far as yer could see, was his’n.” And, further, that it all went, “every shilling on it, to young Miss Dinah” at the old man’s death. Is it one of the mysterious hints repeated over the world in many shapes, that man should look to a future state, that the vulgar should have this profound interest in the reversioner rather than in the person in possession ?

On the two piers of the gateway rose two large carved larks, with the inscription underneath, “TOUJOURS GAI,”

the family motto. Any one asking at the gate was allowed, almost invited, to go up and see the place. Indeed it was open in the summer for two days in the week to picnic parties; and Mr. Gay had built a little pavilion close to the lake for their special use and advantage, where they dined, and could afterwards have their dance.

It was not an old place, or indeed a "place" proper. Mr. Gay had found it a good, square-built, brick house; and having met the well-known adapting architect Jenkinson, who knew what could be "made" of a house without pulling down, and whose devotion to a peculiar style had procured him the name of "Middle-aged Jenkinson," he had secured this gentleman's services, who had put out a gable or two, "run up" a campanile, and laid out a terrace. These small additions had "warmed up" the place a good deal, and did not interfere with the old air of comfort. Mr. Gay, though a pure country squire, had nothing to do with the old notion of the "country squire," but went with the times, and enjoyed everything of the present day. He was fond of travelling, spoke languages, read German a good deal, and enjoyed "life;" that is, even the ordinary blessings of living—a fine day, a pretty view, a good walk, the mere sense of drawing-in the fresh air vigorously—filling his broad chest, and saying, "I never have a day's sickness,"—blessings not known or considered until the *demi-jour* of old age has set in, and the night is drawing on fast. Some day we may learn the art of discounting the cheap pleasures of life, now thought of poorly because so universal.

Four miles off was Calthorpe, the usual country town, into which drove the ladies from the country seats round, to buy at M'Williams & Co.'s, General Drapery House, "*From London.*" (It was common to stand by M'Williams & Co. and say we got things as good from him as from a West-end shop.) At directly the opposite quarter, and about six miles off, was the great town, the metropolis of the district, Ironston, or Irnston as it was

called, a huge manufacruring centre, which seemed to live, and thrive too, in a great yellow mist of its own ; where, as we went flying through it for a mile or so on a line of heavy arches over its streets, we saw tiers of dull red houses, and great red monster buildings, with a gap open, as it were, where were seen flames, and from whence came the ring and ding-dong of metal ; marked out, too, with chimneys, thick as posts, pouring out fumes of black smoke with vigour and earnestness. Looking down below into the street, we saw heavy wains with four and six horses, sauntering, as it were, along with an easy pull, and on every wain a great boiler, or a huge girder, all over rivets, as with metal buttons. Here was a grand town-hall, stately and huge, and even magnificent, but gaunt, and stiff, and inelegant, like the iron-workers themselves. Here a great organ thundered ; here, when the festival came on, iron-throated, stiff-chested men gathered by the hundred, and roared *Israel in Egypt* from throats like ophicleides. And here, in red-brick barracks at the edge of the town, were now quartered the 1st (Du Barry's) Hussars. Every one drove into Calthorpe at half-an-hour's notice, but to drive into Ironston was made a more serious business. It was arranged the day before : there was due dressing, and a regular expedition planned.

There was a set of houses, all at pretty nearly the same distance from Calthorpe : Gay Court, as we have just seen ; Bowman house, "the seat of Mr. and Lady Margaret Bowman ;" and the Crowders, owners of a place called the Priory, which had belonged to a ruined squire, in whose family it had been since the old Priory days. The Crowders were in the "iron" line, and some of the great boilers seen from the railway bridge lying helpless on the waggons were travelling from their great yards. There was Dr. Windle's, the rector's house ; Mrs. Bligh's neat road-side villa ; and Burton, Mr. Lugard's, M.P., a gentlemanly place, quiet, well cut, and well kept—like his own clothes. These families were grouped together. How they "saw each other," how wealth prevailed in the case

of Gay Court, political position at Burton, and how often we could meet the livery servant going up the avenue at Bowman House with the note, in which the "Honour of Mr. and Lady Margaret Bowman's company at dinner" was entreated, we may well imagine. Such a bit of quality will keep a whole district sweet and wholesome, and goes from house to house like the old Irish sacred bell, which was sent for all through the parish and sworn upon, for a small fee, in the case of conflicting testimony. Such is the homage rank must pay to society, and every family in the kingdom hath a right to have its joss, or splendidly gilt image, which it can bow before, and—have to dinner.

Thus much for a little disposition of the characters, and the clearing of the ground, as it were. School-boy days are over; and some years have passed since Dr. Wheeler had his exhibition-day at Prospect House. The lodge-gates of Gay Court are wide open this fine February morning, and the fourth carriage of a series has swept in with that centrifugal turn which is so agreeable to a driver, and which, perhaps, is not unwelcome to the horses. The soft rumbling up the smooth avenue comes gratefully after the rough road; and they pull up with a clatter and scattering of gravel under the light glass-and-iron porch, which Middle-aged Jenkinson has thrown out from the door. Mr. Lugard was the last to arrive on this occasion, riding over from Burton on a fine horse, with a smart, correct, and gentlemanly groom behind.

There must be some little festival at the Court that morning. For the men were standing about and waiting with many a speech of approbation—"Well, and he deserves it, sure enough. Where'd there be a fox only for him?" This was the view of a certain interest. "And a large-minded, liberal-arted man,—none of your sixpenny gents as will take a hard-working man's suvvises gratuitous!"—which stood for popularity in the dining-room. We go up with Mr. Lugard, who is dressed as though he were going to a London flower-show, in an elegant frock-coat, pale trousers,—a scarlet geranium in

his button-hole. As he followed the servant up very fast, for he was a little late, he settled his hair, put on a delicate-tinted glove, and looked surprisingly young indeed.

The large drawing-room was quite full. There was a buzz of voices ; but above them all was heard the hearty laugh of Mr. Gay. There were ladies and gentlemen present ; and beside her father, her hand on his arm, looking up into his face, and laughing as he laughed, was Miss Diana Gay, now grown taller, but a little "filled out," as one of the squires would say, and in face more refined and brilliant than ever. She was all excited. The prettily-shaped mouth was yet more marked ; the skin paler and firmer. And there were the little side *accroche-cœurs*, and the trinkets in which she delighted clinking about her neck and wrists. She had on a white morning jacket, with a tiny frill that stood up about her neck. Every moment that she turned her face to look at some one, or to listen, a bright flush seemed to pass across it. She gave a start and a clap of her hands as she saw Mr. Lugard enter.

"Here he is at last !" she said.

Leaning solemnly against the wall was a large flat object covered up in baize. The squires were looking at it with a sort of veneration. It seemed like a picture.

Mr. Lugard, conferring with two or three gentlemen and taking some papers from them, said, "I think so—quite right." And then, smoothing his hair and stretching his arm so as to have his shirt-sleeve comfortable, he advanced in the middle, and everybody fell away for him. He began in a clear voice, "Mr. Gay,—Sir, I have been deputed by a number of gentlemen and—what is far more important—ladies of this district—ladies and gentlemen who have known you long, sir, and esteem you more the longer they know you—to present to Miss Diana Gay, the charming young lady beside you, whom we all admire, a portrait of her father in—er—hunting costume. We all know what this district was before, sir, *you* took up the hounds, and we know what it is *now*."

And repeated "Hear. hears" low and growling like



hounds, indorsed this sentiment. Mr. Lugard went on to dwell on Mr. Gay's virtues, the charm of his manner (it had been agreed among the donors that no one could do a thing of this sort so happily as Lugard), and, he might add, his hospitality and friendliness. And there was a certain appropriateness, he said, in making such a present to Miss Diana Gay. The Calthorpe Hunt knew pretty well where her place was, whether at the death or at the find. And, in conclusion, Mr. Lugard, going over to the picture, drew the green baize aside, and presented it formally to Diana.

She looked down ; looked up at her father ; then, with great embarrassment, felt her earring. In a low voice she said, "I *do* thank you all very much for this beautiful picture of my dear father, which I shall promise to like nearly as much as I do himself. And I can answer for him, he will always keep up the old Calthorpe Hunt as well as he does now. Thank you, indeed."

This little speech was greeted with immense applause. Then every one crowded round to look at what they had given. There, in a rich broad gold frame, stood John Gay, Esq., of Gay Court, as his name would be read in the next Academy Exhibition, to which it would be sent. There he stood, in a hot scarlet coat and very yellow buckskins, with his heavy whip held across his thighs ; here he stood, looking fixedly and stonily out—certainly as John Gay of Gay Court, a man most mercurial and changeable of face and motion, never looked. There were three of his black-and-white hounds—painted-in very "hard," with their tails like so many stiff notes of admiration—clustered about his boots. In the distance, a faint little glimpse of Gay Court.

Saltmarshe had received five hundred guineas. A "clever fellow"—a kind of "hunting" artist, who was a half-gentleman and asked to country houses. He kept a sort of "screw" himself, rode to hounds, as he said, "to pick up bits of character, you know ;" which he did, in a certain sense, as he contrived to pick up an order now and then to paint a hunter or a hunter's horse.

Hunting-men would have but a poor opinion of your artist fellow ; but when he had done " Nero " and " Peppercorn," and a few more equine portraits—"you'd see the very hairs in his mane," the delighted admirers would cry—his name was made.

" My God ! " cries another, with his glass close to the picture ; " and the very letters on the button ! Never saw anything like it. And the coat ! "

Saltmarshe, the " hunting " artist, would have been delighted had he heard all these compliments. And yet, after all, these hunting-pictures are a little awful, and but a gaunt nightmare-shape of memorial.

Mr. Gay then said a few hearty words. He thanked them from his heart ; he did indeed. His face and figure, he was afraid, was not worth all that fine colour. But they would have it, and his daughter there was content. And he would say he believed it was the most acceptable present she ever got. (And Miss Diana's eyes, fixed on his face, began to glisten, and her classic mouth spread into a smile of delighted affection.) As for what he had done for their hunting, it was all purely selfish. It was a fine manly English sport ; and he should be ashamed to be a fellow—and he believed there were such—who would not encourage it. (Every one knew that this allusion pointed to an odious Mr. M'Gregor, against whom insinuations went about of foul and dark crimes in relation to foxes.) The man that would harm a fox, Mr. Gay went on warmly, he would be on his guard against. He would not trust him ; and he would end badly. Some poet said something about no one's laying his hand on a woman save in the way of kindness. And so he said about the foxes, who should always, as long as he drew breath, have a home and hospitality at Gay Court, and not be disturbed save by fair, honourable, open, manly hunting.

This speech was received with tremendous approbation. And presently all were invited downstairs to what, to the local reporter, poor soul, was " a sumptuous repast," but which was indeed only the common

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shape of entertainment at Gay Court when guests were present.

Lady Margaret, large and rustling, and her satin mantle and laces gathered about her, "beat down" the stairs with Mr. Gay. She was, of course, the woman of honour ; and at every dinner in the district, at the solemn moment of announcement, the host had to present a crooked arm to her ladyship, who, as of course, rustled away and led the procession.





## CHAPTER VI.

“D’ORSAY.”

**D**OWN in the large dining-room she looked round. “Where is that dear girl? She must really come next me, I have so much to say to her. Pretty bright thing she is, she is so happy to-day!”

“Ah, so she does!” said the delighted papa.—“Ducky, won’t you come here next Lady Margaret?”

Miss Diana was in charge of Mr. Lugard, the important person of the day, and was sitting down at the other end of the table when she heard her father’s voice. “Yes, yes, Widge”—a name she had for him—“I’m coming.—Now, Mr. Lugard, you must come; I couldn’t stay for the world.” And, much to that gentleman’s annoyance, they had to change their places.

The table was very crowded. It was a long, large, spacious, sombre room, with a crimson-and-gold paper, and many family pictures hung round. There were a great many guests—all the hunt and the neighbours, except, indeed, the abhorred M’Gregor, against whom the unnatural crime was whispered about, and who was, of course, not fit company for gentlemen. There was a large, red-faced gentleman, very stout, coarse in his voice, whom we have not seen before, which was Mr. Crowder, from the ‘Priory, who was so wonderful in the “iron” way, and

who had a vulgar wife and a large daughter, and who went about in the mornings in a broad-tailed dress-coat. But he was good in the field, rode on a great strong brown horse with enormous quarters and a white star on the forehead, who carried him over, and through, all. This redeemed the wife, broad-tailed coat, vulgarity—everything. He was an “arrant snob” until he was seen one day on the great horse. Mysterious hunting, that levels all distinctions, or rather that raises the lowest to the highest! The remarkable hunting-man, no matter what his degree, wins respect and homage; his words are wisdom: and, though but a chandler, his lordship is proud to have his opinion.

“Ah!” said Mr. Gay, looking down the table, “I don’t see Mrs. Bligh; I want to talk to her. Di, pet, can you find her out?”

Not every one had yet been seated. In a moment Miss Diana had flown away, and returned with the lady.

“Come here, Mrs. Bligh,” said the host; “sit yourself down next me, on this great day for Gay Court. I declare I feel quite proud when I think of myself leaning against the wall upstairs in my gold frame.”

The lady, whom we know to be Robert Bligh’s mother, was a woman with a very remarkable face, with dark hair turning iron-grey, eyes not brilliant, but deep-set and burning with a slow and steady light. All her features were firm, well cut, and almost manly, yet were fine-looking, and had been handsome. She was dressed quietly and even richly, but in a sort of half-mourning; at least with velvet set off with mauve. She spoke with a firm clear voice.

“So Robert is coming down to you,” said Mr. Gay; “I am very glad of it. I told him long ago this over-working won’t do; and a man gets nothing by it, for in the end he has to give in. It is like drawing bills: you get the money down, but have to take it up later with heavy interest, commission, and what not.”

“I tell him so, too,” said she, “but he is ambitious. I am afraid I am a little responsible, for I encouraged

him at the moment ; for a day's success in youth is worth a year's in after-life."

"You're right, Mrs. Bligh ; youth is the time. To hear a young fellow talking of poverty ! Why youth is money, beauty, health—everything ! Listen to that, Doatsey."

That young lady gave a laugh. "I should like to be always young ; at least, never older than papa." Then she coloured, for she thought of Mrs. Bligh, who was smiling at her. "Or, I mean, Mrs. Bligh, too."

Mr. Gay threw himself back and laughed very loudly.

"See how Di gets herself out of a scrape !"

Mrs. Bligh went on : "I knew all this, and what he could do with his great abilities, and am afraid I pressed him too much ; but I did it all for the best. I want to see him a very great man."

The slow fires in her eyes brightened up as she spoke this. She spoke so fervently, Diana looked over at her with interest. The young girl had the greatest reverence for "mind" and talent.

"He is getting on wonderfully, Mrs. Bligh, is he not ?" she asked. "Do you recollect the day at the school ? We all thought him so stupid up to that. When Mr. Lu——"

Miss Diana's mouth took the shape of an O from a feeling of fright, having forgotten Mr. Lugard, his father, who was listening.

"Oh ! I never meant it," said Diana earnestly, and even solemnly ; "I am only joking."

"I know what you mean, Miss Diana ; and it's not fair of you to your old friend Dick. It was a mere accident ; he had got the spelling or Latin-grammar prize ever so often before.—Your son, Mrs. Bligh, who is a very sharp fellow, cleverly threw him off his guard, and I don't blame him.—All's fair, Miss Diana, in love, war, or examinations."

"Nothing of the kind," said Mrs. Bligh, firmly. "Every year, as Dr. Wheeler told me, he worked up nearer and nearer, and that year he succeeded ; he was the best man in the school."

"He'll make a figure, I know," said Mr. Gay. "I had Buller, the Q.C., to dinner when he came down on his circuit; and he says, for the time he has been at it, he is the most wonderful junior he knows. Mind, he comes over here as soon as he arrives. We shall all be glad to see him. Lord Bellman is coming and bringing his horses; and my little lady here wants to fill her house and have some fun.—And Lugard,—I'll write to Dick; he is engaged already."

"Oh, Dick knows," said Mr. Lugard, with one of his sweet smiles. "*He* wouldn't miss it. Though, indeed, how he manages to dispose of all the invitations they shower on him! He has a wonderful tact for getting on. I never told you—did I?—how he got on General Bateman's staff."

"I suppose the general put him on it—ha, ha, ha!"

"Yes; but what made the general put him on it? Why, Dick himself, simply by having tact and being a gentleman. He was walking with Harrington through the town, and he saw a shabbily-dressed woman, with a cur-dog biting at her dress. She seemed frightened; and Harrington, whose father, by the way, is a leather man, laughed heartily, and was passing on when she appealed to him. But Dick recollected a bit of advice I gave him, always to be gentlemanly to every woman—for it might be a rich old woman, who would leave him a fortune; no one could tell—and Dick went up, beat the dog away, took off his hat, and was greatly laughed at by the leather fellow. But who do you suppose this was? No other than Mrs. Bateman, the general's wife, come to look out for a house. And within a month Dick, who knows how to build for himself if you give him any sort of a foundation, was on the general's staff. I assure you," added Mr. Lugard, raising his voice, "a little of that tact and readiness is worth all the drudgery and learning in the world; because, you see, it does more in a minute than the other would do in years."

This view certainly did impress the company, and Diana looked round at Mr. Lugard with a little mysterious

air of awe habitual to her when she heard anything *very* wise. Who does not admire an instance of the exquisite science of "getting on in the world," or rather the charm of "manner" which acts so magically and yet so cheaply—and the want of which is so fatal?

Mr. Lugard, who always talked in a sweet and luscious way, which gives quite a young air, then told them more about his son.

"He's uncommonly extravagant though," he said. "For a mere lad as he is, it's outrageous." (He always impressed on his hearers this fact of "being a mere lad;" and certainly people meeting them in the street had taken them for elder and younger brothers). "But I can't complain, for he has paid his way hitherto. He has a horse this moment, which we'll see him turn out on some morning, worth three hundred, and for which he paid forty. There, again, you see, judgment is worth money."

Lady Margaret had been busy all this while with her lunch—for she had an admirable appetite, and liked her "glass of wine," as she said; a mere euphuism, which it would be discourteous to test by cross-examination—and had been very busy with soup, chicken, tongue, salad, and other good things. As has been said, she was inclined to a full habit of person, which seemed clamorous for nourishment. At the first lull she turned to Diana and took possession of that young lady, absorbing her with speech, lips, hands, and rustling shawl, as though she had been a tender bit of the breast of a chicken.

"And now tell me about yourself," said Lady Margaret in a quite confidential way that was her characteristic. "What day will you come over and stay? I heard your father talk of Lord Bellman. We know them, my dear child, as well as you do me. Met them at Aix-la-Chapelle, both of us at Dremel's—poor Bowman screaming with his liver—and that nice youth that was with him. Poor Lady Bellman! she used to walk with me and tell me her troubles; for he wasn't the best of—you know. I must tell your father to bring them over to see us."



"Oh yes," said Diana, listening gravely to this stream of talk. "I'll tell papa, and I am sure he will be delighted."

"You must come, my dear," went on Lady Margaret, affecting not to see her glass being filled again with champagne, and then starting with horror; "and stay a long, long time. I want you to know our Canning, who will be with us. He has promised to get some time from his duties. He is getting on so. I could show you letters from Lord Cumberley at the Foreign Office. *Such* letters! They can do nothing without him. Ah, my dear, I wish we had all such a head as our Canning. I assure you," and Lady Margaret nodded her head significantly, "there's many a girl in town would be glad to get him."

Our Diana, as mentioned, was always impressed by the influence of great intellectual gifts, and listened with that little air of awe and mystery which became her so much. "And he is so clever," she said. "They say so."

"I don't like repeating these things," said her ladyship, looking round; "but I will show you letters when you come to Bowman House that will astonish you. Lord Cumberley came in the other day to the office, and said, 'Who's doing this?' and they told him one of the ordinary people of the place. And he said at once, 'Send down for Mr. Canning Bowman.' My dear, I wish we could all do as well as Canning. Only wait, and we shall see." And Miss Diana was greatly impressed by the meaning of this rather trite remark, which, indeed, may be a prophecy of failure as well as of success; and by waiting we may see the one as well as the other.

Now the company broke out into the great good-humour that early luncheon always induces. Now the conversation had taken a special and characteristic turn, and the air was filled with lumbering scraps and fragments of incidents. Could the sounds in that sombre dining-room have frozen up, as in the Munchausen legend, and thawed again in a new generation, such sounds as "off-hock," "pounded," "got a cropper," "hard over the

fence,” “finished at the covers,” and such phrases, would have been floating about. Then some went away, others went out to the garden, and a few amateurs were told by Mr. Gay that by-and-by, when he had “settled the ladies,” he would show them the horses; and no connoisseurs relished the pictures, books, gardens, &c., with the zest with which the horse gentlemen do a visit to that “choice and rare gallery,” the stable.

Mr. Gay, going up to the drawing-room, found the ladies there, looking at his picture again.

“There I am again,” he said. “Between ourselves, I shall begin to hate myself, I look so stiff and fiery. Surely I never stood that way, simpering, with my leg bent, and those poor wooden dogs staring at me. If I *was* on the ground, I was always calling to some one, or patting their heads, or looking out over the hills. But I suppose Saltmarshe knows his trade best. Between ourselves, I think he ain’t much on a horse’s back, whatever he is off of it; though he talks plenty about setting his beast at this jump and that jump.—Eh, ducksy,” he added, putting his arm about Miss Diana, who had come up, “do you remember when you pulled up Saltmarshe? He said he’d been out with the Linkwater hounds the last week; and he and old Monboddo, and two other fellows, had stuck on to the end; and he was dead-beat, and all that. And what did you say to him, Di, in your own quiet, sly way,—come?”

“I told him, pa,” said Diana, laughing, but with her eyes on the ground, “that he must have been out hunting by himself; for the last hunt of the season was in *Bell’s Life* a fortnight before. And he got so red that I think he’d have chopped me in two. But,” she said, becoming grave, “I must go and speak to the rector’s wife and her daughters.”

“There’s a knowing young lady,” said her father, looking after her with great pride. “She’ll get on. I declare it was as good as a play, the way she plagued the fellow. And I wasn’t a bit sorry. You know he was by way of being fine and at the nobility’s parties—Lady

Jane and this, and 'Tumbletowers said to me'—that is, the Earl of Tumbletowers, you know. And I do believe he was trying the romantic with my little girl, coming down in his velvet jacket and a Raphael sort of look on. But she was up to him; and I must say it was rich to listen to her. The first time he came down in these togs she was looking at him very steadily, and he was languishing, when she says gravely, 'I declare, Mr. Saltmarshe, you're so like Lady Margaret's fine postilion.' Very rude, and all that, but *uncommon* good, you know. But when he found her one day putting a pair of moustaches in my picture, it was going too far, and he threatened to leave the house. Between ourselves, I had to blow her up. Oh, he's a humbug; but the hunting-fellows here would have him. There's a very different style at the end of the room. You know this one, of course, Lady Margaret. That poor fellow George!"

This was a picture of a fair-haired young man, in old-fashioned regimentals, with a high, choking collar.

"So it is; he was in the army. Yes."

And having supplied this information, which was indeed surplusage, she gazed steadily at it.

"I always feel as if I was in his shoes, where I had no right to be," said Mr. Gay with great feeling; "and only for my little woman there, I would as soon be where I was. He was foolish, but a good fellow. He was spoiled by being an elder son. They gave him his own way in everything; and when he was over twenty, he of course wanted to have it in an important matter, and they wouldn't give it to him, so he took it himself."

He was looking steadily at the picture of the young officer. Lady Margaret listened with deep reverence.

"Oh, indeed; yes. I remember it well. As fine a young man as I ever saw. And his taking out Lord Polehampton's daughter at the county ball, and every one saying what a pair they were. Melancholy business his throwing himself away on such a marriage."

"Poor lad!" said Mr. Gay, now in a reverie: "I stayed

at Boulogne as we came through, to see that they took care of his grave."

The group was but of three—Lady Margaret, Mrs. Bligh, and Mr. Gay. All were looking at the picture—Lady Margaret, with a sort of tearful air, and Mr. Gay with deep affection. But the sun, as it poured in through the window and lit up the mellowed crimson of the young officer's coat, passed across Mrs. Bligh's cold face. In that face was neither sympathy nor affection, but a smile almost of exultation, it seemed, at least satisfaction. Mr. Gay, turning away his eyes slowly from the picture, saw it, and started.

"Ah, to be sure!" he said quickly; "you knew the whole story. My poor wife told you everything."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bligh, "I knew it all; I dare say more than you did, Mr. Gay. But it had best be all forgotten."

"To be sure," he said. "Look over there, now," he added suddenly, "the little heiress! How she walks with dignity, as if she was married twenty years. I don't know how she picked up that air. She's shy, though she can fool and tomboy it with the youngest. But she'd walk into a room full of company like a little queen, and go up to the lady of the house with her train sweeping behind her. But I've forgotten the squires all out. Those gentry know how to swear. Come along. No? Well, where is her highness? Bring Mrs. Windle, dear,—she must come,—and show her our nags."

The party went round to the stables, which were architectural. Even here the spirit of "Middle-aged Jenkinson" had ruled, and that splendidly, showing that the noble animals who occupied them were in a county where they were held in the highest honour, and lodged and boarded quite luxuriously. Their houses—"boxes"—were warmed in the winter and ventilated in the summer; they had a whole train of upper and lower servants to wait on them, and lived a sort of Turkish existence after their day's professional exertion, taking their baths, and being shampooed and elegantly coifféd

by trained hairdressers. There were five hunters in the stables, besides hacks, and nags, and many carriage-horses. These ladies and gentlemen were disturbed at their dinner without apology, and led out just as they were, in their stylish, red-bordered dressing-gowns, to be gazed at and admired. They were not at all pettish or ill-tempered, as other noble persons might have been at being so disturbed; nay, were not even put out when the servants swept the dressing-gowns off their backs, and left them Eve-like, and not in the least ashamed.

"Walk the Don, John," Miss Diana cried in excitement, for she was directing the whole operations. "Isn't he a noble fellow? That's papa's own horse, and no one else can ride him—and—I wish *he* didn't."

"But he stands for a great deal of money, popsey," said her father; "I am ashamed to tell all he cost me. He's not wicked."

Admiring hands were being passed down over the flanks and quarters of the animal, with the skilful touch of which horse admirers have the knack, so that, though the Don lunged out with his hind feet, there was no danger to the connoisseurs, who kept out of his way adroitly. Heads were put back and on one side, as the great tall creature ambled slowly by, and arched his great neck, and seemed to expostulate with his groom—"What is the use of holding me down so tight?" and then continued his progress in a sort of stately and springing prance.

"There's a fellow to take one over the stiff Garrow country—when he's in good-humour, of course, for he *has* a trick or two."

Horse connoisseurs find great delight in what seems fault-finding, but is indeed only a kindly wishing that certain fancies of their own were present: "Runs off *ever so little* too fine here;" "might be a trifle closer." But these were but faint objections. There was one just man, of stern authority, and whom every one, and Mr. Gay especially, was anxious to hear,—a low, black-whiskered, thick-set little man, who carried the stick of a hunting-whip in a side pocket, and whose rigid adherence to the

ground seemed to figure his moral adherence to his hunting creed. Every one knew Pratt, the county-town solicitor, who had a good business, which he mysteriously contrived to combine with the real profession to which he was articted, namely "horses." We all knew those inimitably racy pictures of hunting-days, which came out but too rarely, in the *Calthorpe Mercury*, and were signed "Buckskin," and headed, perhaps, "A Clipping Day with the Calthorpe Hounds," in which we saw "Reynard," and had "Yoicks, hark for'ard!" and all the dramatic incidents. It was universally agreed in the hunt that Pratt could earn a sum, fixed at about two thousand a year, up in London, by writing these vigorous hunting letters; which, if founded in truth, seemed like fatuity on his part, as he was certainly giving them gratis to the *Calthorpe Mercury*.

This gentleman would not say much, though often appealed to, and even eagerly, by Mr. Gay. "Ay! ay! a fair 'orse. I know him well," was his highest praise. But later he was heard to say to a friend in an undertone, "A little too much sealin'-wax in the foreleg;" which seemed to hint at a slightness or brittleness in the limb of the Don; a speech that was overheard by Mr. Gay, whose eye often afterwards settled ruefully, and with mis-giving, on the part alluded to.

Other horses were then led out; and then Diana ran over to the head groom. "Now then," said she, "forward with D'Orsay." And in a moment a fine, delicately-made, satin-coated bay came out, tripping daintily with his refined limbs, like an elegantly-made dandy as he was. This was D'Orsay—Miss Diana's own horse. She ran up to him. She had on a tiny hat, all over flowers, called to him, patted him, and laid her cheek against his soft coat. The fine creature knew her, and turned his head round to look at her with the strange glance which horses give. The two faces—his great and gaunt and solemn, hers small and delicate and laughing—were a contrast.

"He is the best of them all, Mr. Pratt," she cried.

"He can do anything. He is my pet, my king of dandies, Mr. Pratt." That gentleman nodded in reply, and sucked the bone top of his stick. "He'd put your fine horse, John Bull, Mr. Pratt," said she, still speaking from the neck of the favourite, "to all his paces."

Mr. Pratt became enthusiastic in a moment, and walked forward.

"He won't last, you see, Miss Gay," he said mysteriously. "He'll give here," he added, laying his hand on his own calf. "And he a'n't tight enough to lift himself high and together, over things. No, no, Miss Gay."

"But you've not seen him out, Mr. Pratt," Diana said, less daring. "I tell you you are jealous—I know you are—after that dreadful John Bull, which you think nothing can match."

"See here, Miss Gay," said Mr. Pratt, again growing excited (there were two things only his friends said had that effect—a horse and a glass of something)—"see here, Miss Gay. There a'n't such a 'orse in England. No; nor in the northern nor in the southern counties all put together. And as for D'Orsay there, he can't put himself together so as to get over clean."

Diana's eyes brightened. "Get the bar, then! Get the bar! Bring out my saddle!—D'Orsay darling, they're slandering you."

The grooms in a moment were fitting D'Orsay with his saddle of servitude, and elegant fetters were bound about his noble head.

"Diana dear," her father said gravely, yet amused, "what are you about?"

"You'll see," she said, putting her face close to his. "Poor dear D'Orsay has a fine opportunity now, and I want to show him off—the handsome creature. Do let me. I'll get my habit."

She had tripped away in a second. D'Orsay lifted his head and looked after her fearfully and doubtfully. Had he been "tricked?"—if so, perhaps he was making up his mind to plunge and kick off the first fellow that should dare profane his noble back.

They moved on to the lawn. Mr. Pratt, examining D'Orsay more critically, travelling up his handsome legs with his eye, and then crossing the chest to his quarters, was now quite convinced he never could put himself together. But here was Miss Diana in a new costume, which, as she is the heroine of this little piece, and whom as such we should naturally like to set in as many engaging lights as possible, may be described in this place. She had put on a little grey-felt hat with a green feather, and her habit fitting her like a French glove. Then we could see what a tiny yet graceful figure hers was. From the excitement a tinge of colour had come into her cheeks. D'Orsay, relieved in his mind, welcomed her by steadily pawing a hole in the grass.

"Papa is to put me up," she cried; "no one else!" And her father performed that office.

"You are a funny child," he said.

Funny she might be; but the combination of the two figures—hers and D'Orsay's, both so refined and "well-bred"—was delightful. She was now at home; just as a pretty yacht is at home when the sails fill and she begins to move; and here was D'Orsay ambling softly over the grass, just to get himself into comfortable warmth. Her soft voice called out as she went by, "Put up the bar as high as Mr. Pratt wants." And that gentleman, calmly eager for the investigation of truth, pointed critically with his hunting-stick to a particular height, and said that would try him fairly. Round swept D'Orsay and his light mistress, swaying in as they did so. One touch of a little whip, both were bounding along, and D'Orsay was over in a second, landing lightly and airily. Yet the critical audience saw at that select trial that there was justice in what Mr. Pratt had said, and that D'Orsay had the tendency common to other beaux and dandies—"not to put himself together" when he made an exertion. Mr. Pratt, however, graciously allowed the horse had done fairly.

"But I tell you what, Miss Diana," added he with an unusual energy, and digging in the ground with his



hunting-handle, "he's got a wild touch in his eye. You wouldn't hold him in if he took it into his head to bolt one fine morning. Your wrist a'n't strong enough. I couldn't hold him. And see here, Miss Diana. If this 'orse should be wanting his head one fine morning—see here," and he pointed without much illustrative meaning to a hole in the grass, recently made with his whip, "you'd have to give it to him."

Miss Diana looked a little alarmed at this prophecy, then suddenly recollected herself, and, patting the satin neck, said, "Well, and I should give him his dear old head if he wanted it. And why shouldn't I?"

"Well then, Miss Diana," continued Mr. Pratt, gathering fervour in his vaticination, "if ever that 'ere 'orse should once get his head—"

"Oh ! stop Mr. Pratt—stop him saying these dreadful things !" said Diana. "I don't care ; D'Orsay is a nobleman, and has gentle blood, and is not to be compared to John Bull such-like creatures."

And, with a toss of her head, Miss Diana walked away beside D'Orsay, with his bridle in her hand.

Now the company had scattered a good deal and dropped away. The manufacturer's family were among those looking on,—Mr. Crowder and his wife, and Miss Kitty Crowder, the tall young lady, who had been about the grounds and gardens with a young gentleman of good fortune. She was a fine girl—as mentioned, tall, strong, aggressive, and overpowering to timid natures. But one rude-spoken and elderly colonel, hearing this praise, put up his glass—"Fine girl, d'ye say? Fine fifteen 'stun,' I say ;" which coarse language was indeed an exaggeration of some private views about her.

She came to the front pushing, and stooped forward. "What's all this? What's going on? Oh, look, Mr. Wilson, they're showing the horses. Well, I can tell you, we don't see this always. What I admire in Miss Diana is her perfect self-possession, and what would I give for such a gift? Now I could no more bring myself to get up on a horse in that way and jump before people than I could fly."

As a matter of comparison, the "fine girl" would have appeared to infinitely greater advantage mounted on a spirited charger than in suspending the laws of nature and soaring through the air in the way she spoke of. But no one knew better than Kitty Crowder that the amount of public attention and admiration is constant and invariable, and that where any favoured object attracts a greater portion, it is only drawn from the shares of others who suffer in proportion. As he or she ascends, so we go down. Miss Kitty, having many disadvantages to struggle against—the hated iron-foundry to begin with the more plebeian airs of her parents, the dress-coat, in the morning, &c.—had found that she could not afford to lose a point, and could only hold her own by being a sort of "Garibaldian" in society. She always went as it were with her musket slung behind her, which she had cocked, and presented on a moment's provocation. Need it be said that she was a true "officer's girl," ranging among the warriors, delighting in their company with an almost manly frankness, and admitting them to a charming freedom of speech? As the regiments came and stayed and went away again, with that economical fitfulness which characterises the mind of the British War-office, they bore away with them legends and stories of Miss Crowder; and over many a mess-table in the United Kingdom the name of "Kitty Crowder" was mentioned with affection—nay, rather too familiarly. So do the warriors distinguish those whom they delight to honour. And yet the spectacle of a woman thus fighting her battle gallantly and singlehanded, all up the hill, dragging after her such burdens as a vulgar father and mother, and battling on, it may be a little unscrupulously, may challenge our admiration, and, in a sense, our respect.

When Diana came back, in great delight at having vindicated her friend, Miss Kitty received her with the delight and excess of warm and admiring wonder which is one of the happiest light-skirmishing weapons known to our young ladies. Diana had at first liked Miss Kitty, and was inclined to make her into a bosom friend, with

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all the effusion which gentle, timid natures have for such grand she-captains. But as there was a certain honesty and candour about the other which could not take the trouble to conceal any little spite or jealousy, Diana soon came to regard her with an undefined feeling of suspicion and discomfort in her company ; symptoms by which the Garibaldian was not in the least disturbed, for she knew her own power and the other's delicacy, and was secure of getting all advantages to be drawn from Gay Court, without the slightest risk of check or coolness on the side of her friend. Besides, Mr. Gay had joined in the cry of her being so "fine a girl," and rather pitied the social condition of her father and mother, who he said were "good, coarse, worthy people," whom he was determined to stand by and back up.

Now she was standing over our little Diana, overwhelming her with voluble compliments. "I could not make out what was going on. It seemed to me and Mr. Wilson like people at a circus.—Didn't it, Mr. Wilson?—And such courage too, dear. To see your little figure on that great horse in the middle, and all those people standing round and looking on. I should have fainted. Don't you think so, Mr. Wilson?"

"Not at all," said that gentleman, with the frankness all Miss Kitty's friends maintained towards her; "indeed you would not. I've seen you go through more than that."

The Garibaldian, to do her justice, had no hypocrisy, and had her musket unslung in a moment. "You'll do the fainting for me," she said. "What was that story about Mr. Wilson and the sunk fence? Gates are a delightful invention, Mr. Wilson?"

That gentleman coloured. "No man in his senses would have taken it," he said, colouring, "at least—"

"Then Mr. Gay and half the hunt were out of theirs," she said, laughing, "for they got over.—Tell me, my dear, what's all this about the lord who is coming—and the lord's son? When are they coming—are they to stay long? What's to be the divarshion, as the Irish say? Who are they at all?—tell me about them, do, dear."

And now, grown affectionate, Miss Kitty's arm was round Diana's slight waist. This endearment for the time quite won Diana's heart. She always felt for her sisters when she saw them suffering from strokes such as Mr. Wilson had so unkindly given.

"He is an old friend of papa's, and he has been obliged to live an immense deal abroad on account of his wife. She has got well at last, and papa has not seen him for years ; and as my birthday is coming on, why, he thought we should have a little fun here. And you know papa is so good to me, he will do whatever I ask or propose. And he says you're to come and stay also."

Mr. Pratt's tax-cart now came round.

"Good-bye, Miss Gay," he said, as he took the reins ; "but D'Orsay's no 'orse, I must tell you."

Mr. Gay was coming up.

"What, taking away D'Orsay's character? What's wrong with him? What d'ye mean, Pratt?"

Diana tossed her head.

"Mr. Pratt has been at this all day. He's quite jealous of my poor horse, compared with his own enormous, dreadful creature."

"What!" cried Mr. Gay. "Why, he'd beat his head off, over any country! Pratt, are you serious in such a criticism, and putting your Flemish dray-horse against my Diana's Arabian?"

Mr. Pratt swung himself up into his cart—what indeed seems to be part of the enjoyment of that vehicle—and, drawing on what looked a pair of metal gloves, said slowly—

"There's to be a drag-hunt at Badgerly next week. If you think all that, Mr. Gay, you can see then."

Diana laughed with delight.

"A drag-hunt!—charming! The very thing!"

"Then I tell you what, Master Pratt: if you come on the back of your great animal, I'll match him for a fifty on the back of D'Orsay, the stakes to be handed over to the owner of the horse—there, duckseycums!" and he looked at her with fondness.

"Done, Mr. Gay!" said the other, taking out his book and pencil. "It's down." Then he took his "ribbons" and drove away.

"Oh, what fun—what fun!" said Diana. "A race, a real race! I shan't sleep for thinking of it. Poor darling D'Orsay to be talked of in that way!"

"Yes," said Mr. Gay; "and I've heard the fellow goes about the country talking of *me*, saying I have no eye for a horse, and all that. I don't believe he's a judge himself at all. I wish I'd made it a hundred now.—Well, you'll come to us, Miss Crowder?"

"Oh, how kind, how nice!" said the Garibaldian, pressing her friend's small waist in a rapture of gratitude. "I don't know what to say to you. I shall be so glad to get away from our dungeon. No one ever comes near us. We have always to be running after them, and writing, and fixing days. Now I like people pouring in of themselves, coming spontaneously—like here. Do ask the officers, dear; lots of them. They'll be only too happy to come. I'll get you Major Spring and Captain Gilpin. They are all charming; and Captain Gilpin so funny. I'll ask him to bring his dress, and do the knife-grinder."

Diana's eyes began to sparkle. "Oh, how nice that will be! And what dress?"

"Of course the real rags. He saw it on a real grinder in the street, and got him up to the barracks and gave him ten shillings for the whole. They weren't worth sixpence; but, as Captain Gilpin says, they were worth pounds to *him*; as he couldn't have got anything like them made for ten times the money. And he had them boiled down in a copper by the mess-man—only think! And it will make you die laughing. But you must tell me beforehand, to secure him in time."

This splendid programme quite impressed Diana, who looked with some awe at her friend. Any little plan brought out suddenly in this fashion became bathed in golden clouds on the instant, and quite dazzled her.

"What fun we shall have!" she said.

"Oh, he comes to us again and again," said the Garibaldian. "You are sure young Chimeleigh is to be with you?"

"Oh, certain! His father is to bring him. Why?"

"Because, dear," said the Garibaldian, with an air of mock innocence, "I have marked him down as my property. I have a feeling that he is charming; and that we should get on delightfully. But you wouldn't help a poor girl, that has no advantages at home, and who, if she had such advantages as others have, would do as well, my dear. But your mamma and papa don't know papa would marry me to one of his great girders or marine engine-boilers, and think me splendidly off. But no, you would not; no girl ever helps a friend."

Was not this an artful challenge? It was touching our Diana in the most sympathising corner of her gentle heart; and at once another dazzling plan suggested itself—to make the splendid young Chimeleigh the captive of her dear friend Kitty's charms—not of the Kitty beside her, but of the romantic helpless girl, "who had no advantages at home," drawn so skilfully by Kitty herself. The arrangement was sealed on the spot by some fervent kisses.

Now the party began to disperse. The agricultural faces of the "squires" were rather flushed with the unaccustomed champagne so early. But it was time to go. Gigs and horses were coming round. The iron-master's carriage—a gaudy, glittering, canary-coloured edifice on wheels, with servants in a very glowing crimson livery (Mr. Lugard had said to Diana it was like "a broken damson-tart")—came heavily up. Mr. Crowder heaved himself in heavily, as though he were a Lord Mayor. Every one had had a most delightful morning.



## CHAPTER VII.

### MOTHER AND SON.

**I**N that high road along which indeed were disposed most of the residences of our characters and at about a mile's distance from Gay Court, was the little villa where Mrs. Bligh lived—a small unpretending house, bright as new cream, kept without a speck, close to the road, with its top storey peeping warily over the edge of a low wall, much as one of her “nice” maids did when the coach was heard passing by. It had been an old house, altered, modernised, and beautified, much as our thrifty housewives will shape and decorate a dress of an old cut ; but, like such remodelled garments, the little piecing and stretching here and there betrayed the old date. There were pretty greenhouses (which, when the sun shone, glistened like a fountain petrified), pretty little gardens, orchards, &c.—all on a small scale.

There she lived all the year round by herself, not by any means a recluse, dressing handsomely and with taste, and always looking forward to the visits of her son, who came down some three or four times in the year. Clergyman, squire, and other neighbours said she was a wonderfully clever, “long-headed” woman. Mr. Gay wished he knew about as much of the world as was in her little finger.

"I declare she's as fond of that son of hers as I am of my little dame at home ; but my lord up there in town at his briefs, he don't like her as much as my poppet does her daddy—that couldn't be beaten. Why don't he have her to live with him in town, and make his breakfast for him like a gentleman? He's some calculation about that in his head, depend upon it ; for he is a deuced knowing fellow. It's very odd."

But by-and-by a nearer acquaintance with the lady spoken of will show that injustice was done to the son, and that the mother had excellent reasons for remaining down in the country.

On this evening she was walking up and down her garden, with her eyes on the ground, her hands joined behind her, and her feet stepping forward with a firm regimental tread. The time was about six o'clock. She was dressed in her velvet, which so became her, and her figure was picturesque. At times she stopped, and would call to a window, "Hannah, look again, and see if he is coming."

After one of these orders, Hannah called suddenly, "Here he is ! I see a fly at the top of the hill."

In a few seconds more a fly with a portmanteau was at the railed gate, and a young man had jumped out, and the lady, when she heard the news, had gone hastily into her drawing-room and sat down. She had time to look in the glass and settle her iron-grey hair, and then sit queen-like on the sofa to receive her son. In a moment a voice was heard outside, and a young man, entering hastily, was embracing her.

He was broad-shouldered, strongly-built, with fair hair, a broad, high forehead, pale blue eyes that wandered thoughtfully over to the face of any one who made a remark, and rested on that face as if weighing the force of what had been said. He had a light moustache and small beard, and certainly looked an experienced man of about thirty years of age ; and yet he was no more than two or three and twenty.

They talked long on the sofa, until Hannah came to



say dinner was ready ; and then mother and son walked in with some ceremony. It was very choice ; each dish was small, and had been prepared with care.

"I have got you all your favourite things, Robert. I know what you always liked ; and there is your favourite wine."

Robert shook his head. "I have to give up all these good things now, mother," he said ; "Doctor Saunders has issued orders—the plainest of the plain for me in future."

"Ah, I had forgot," she said ; "how stupid ! Then Hannah shall do a chop for you, and you shall eat, and we shall not speak until you have done."

"But that will be so stupid for you ; and you are taking nothing."

"I like to sit in this way and see you eat, provided you enjoy it. Go on—do, Robert. Take some more of this ; you must be hungry after that long journey."

At night, when the lamp was lighted, mother and son were seated in the drawing-room talking together. They did not rise till past midnight. They consulted very seriously together. What they said will show the character of both. After some preface she came to a point that seemed to be on her mind.

"And now about your getting on, Robert. You are really doing so well ?"

"Nothing could be better. They tell me there is no junior of my standing so forward. I am so thankful. I assure you, mother, the day and night together is not long enough for all I have to get through. It is so delightful to be in full, swinging work. To start with exhilaration in the morning—finish off this—finish off that—then snatch breakfast—then on again—more work—snatch dinner, and light the lamps for a good, comfortable, quiet, delicious study—and all the time know that for every hour golden guineas are coming in, or rather gold and silver guineas—shillings and sovereigns. I wouldn't give up the shilling, mother. Buller, my Q.C., I assure you, my dear mother, I know can do nothing without me.

That is *such* a back to me; for the solicitors know it, and he is so run on, a word from him to them—'Send that to Mr. Bligh, he knows the papers'—is quite enough."

"But, my dear Robert, take care of what you have done in interrupting all this run of good fortune. You know I would give my health for yours any day, or my life either; but you look strong and well, and take care this is not fanciful."

The young man paused a little, and answered gravely, "Do you know I was afraid of that myself for a long time; but at last it came to symptoms there was no mistaking—so queer about the head, you know; and once *that* went, mother, then indeed all would be up. But I shouldn't have minded myself, only for Saunders, the doctor, a good friend, who said, as sure as I lived, in six months I *must* break down. He is a barristers' doctor, and has known so many do the same. You know I have some self-denial, and so I rationally agreed with him to stop in time and take a month or two's rest, which will quite set me up."

Mrs. Bligh looked at him thoughtfully.

"You are always sensible, Robert. I wonder where you got that command of yourself. Another 'getting on' like you, would not have power to stop in his full course—and would have worked himself into softening of the brain or blindness."

"There is no merit," said he, smiling; "better to lose a little than lose all. I tell them it is drawing bills on your life. I felt a little ashamed about Buller, who is fagging himself for a wife and family in the regular style—takes his dinner standing, and all that. By the way," he added with a little hesitation, "I wanted to tell you about *that* also."

"About what, dear?" she said.

"About Buller and his family. He has three sons and"—with hesitation—"one daughter. He is sure to be a Vice-chancellor one of these days."

Mrs. Bligh's brows contracted into a frown and she drew herself up.

"Surely—"

"No, no, no," he said good-humouredly ; " don't think of such a thing, mother. I was only wishing to consult you. People tell me it would be a very good thing—that a hundred others would give their eyes for the same chance ; and that it would bind Buller to me securely ; that if he were made Vice-chancellor, I should come in for something very good too ; and in short, you see, mother—it might be considered."

Mrs. Bligh remained silent ; drawn up rigidly, with her eyes on the carpet reflectively.

"Well," she said at last, "you have mentioned all the advantages—the business ones—but you have said nothing about the girl ;—what about her ? Do you like her ? Does she care for you ?"

Bligh slowly raised his shoulders.

"Well," he said, "it has not come exactly to that. She's a good girl enough—a barrister's daughter. But there is the difficulty—I do *not*."

"Then," said his mother quickly, "you must *not*. Don't let it near you. Dismiss it altogether. A man of your genius and talents must look higher than that. There is a great game before you, if it is played properly. You have all the qualities for it, and that which is the rarest and most precious—caution and self-restraint ; for every one breaks down on that. I know that you have learned how to *wait* for the right moment, and to know it when it comes."

"But, my dear mother, what do you mean ?"

"A humdrum lawyer's daughter," she went on, "with a beggarly few thousand pounds ! A wretched place, and broken-down health, going down to a dark office every day ! Would you get to know people of rank and influence ? Would they come to you in your office ? My dear Robert, money is getting so plenty, and will be getting so plenty by-and-by, and those comforts which money brings are so common, that talent is every day rising in the market, and is getting scarcer too. They'll discover no gold-fields of *that* article."

"Very just, mother," he said thoughtfully ; "but what would you have me do?"

She went on quickly—

"I have been laying out plans for you. It is most fortunate you are down here. I know what can be done, and what you must do. *Gay Court is the place.*"

"What, Diana!—Oh, nonsense!"

"Sense, though. I know it, and I know how it can be done. What is *your* difficulty, Robert—flying too high?"

"Yes, I thought so."

"My dear Robert, that is the most fatal delusion of all in the world ; and the best advantage for the wise man. Nothing is too high, provided you only show you *think* yourself high enough for it. If you are timorous and apologetic, you will be taken at your own worth, and set down as presumptuous. Am I right?"

He was listening thoughtfully.

"It is quite true," he said ; "but—"

"No people are so accessible as great people—people of rank. So with people whom you think are above you and 'will not think of you.' My dear Robert, I know women. The determined perseverance of a man, even if he be every way inferior, is not at all so disagreeable. They think a compliment a homage ; and with this basis for a *man of genius* to work on, you see—"

"No one knows and admires your sense more than I do, mother," he said ; "but I confess in this matter I don't see anything. You know how I used to admire her. She is a brilliant creature. Even when I was thinking of Buller's daughter her image used to rise. But to think of this bright girl choosing a Digest, a Book of Reports, for a husband ! She who was accustomed to everything delightful, cheerful ! And her father—"

"What folly !" broke in Mrs. Bligh warmly. "You say, Robert, there is sense in what I say, and yet you *don't* think so. Look at me. You know what I was. Your mother. I was what is called 'poor.' But I was a born lady in mind, Robert. We were twelve brothers

and sisters—my father a poor, broken man, my mother a helpless woman, overwhelmed with her cares and responsibilities,—sisters and brothers a perfect herd, that could do nothing for themselves but eat and walk. I had the only head among them; and I determined I would work for myself and rise. I never told you, Robert, how I did it. But you will say the difficulties were insurmountable. Think of a poor girl struggling out of a slough like that. But I did.”

Her son took her hand kindly.

“It was no scheming, or from no adventurous views, but self-preservation. I should have sunk. Some charitable uncle had left us fifty pounds a-piece. They spent all theirs out of hand; but I kept mine. And when theirs was gone, they came on me for my wretched scrap. But I refused. I wanted it for what would benefit them as well as me; but of course, being a herd, they could not understand that. We had an aunt who knew some ‘nice’ people, and used to go to Bath now and then,—a cold, selfish old maid. For years I had tried to get her to take me; for I knew I had good looks and good sense, and that once there I would have a chance. At last with some little money I had saved I had to bribe her, and she agreed. You know the rest. I triumphed over all difficulties and got to Bath. Your father saw me, and I married a *gentleman*. I did it myself, and in spite of all difficulties. He was rich then, though he died poor. For a poor helpless girl without money to carry out a plan of that sort and succeed seemed more impossible than what I want *you* to do.”

Robert Bligh remained silent and thoughtful.

“Now, will you make me a promise,” she went on—“or two or three promises—that you will give up the Buller girl, as you call her, for the present?”

“My dearest mother,” he said, cheerfully, “to be sure.”

“Then, that you will work yourself with all your will and help me as far as you can in what I propose. I have prepared the way already. You know what privileged people mothers are. They are the only people tolerated

in puffing their relations : they are admired for doing so. I have talked to her about you ; and— Do you remember that business at the school ? ”

“ With Dick Lugard ?—to be sure.”

“ She was always a little curious about that—of course flattered, as any girl would be, to have even two boys fighting for her. I told her what was the real cause—namely, that you had taken up the cudgels for your poor old mother. Ah, Robert, I cannot tell you how I felt that, my dear child ! ”

Robert took her hand, and kissed her cheek. “ Old mother, indeed ! ” he said. “ What folly ! You want a compliment. Buller says you’re the handsomest woman of your time he has ever met.”

“ Foolish ! ” said she ; but by an instinctive motion her hand went up to her head and smoothed her hair.

Who shall talk of such as vanity ? Men’s conceit is the vanity of monkeys, and purely selfish ; women’s, in the main, is but one more token of affection and homage—decking themselves, and keeping their charms fresh, but to retain the affection of the grand creatures who own and control them.

“ Lugard,” she went on softly, “ or his father, I suspect, contrived to make her believe that it was all your triumph and overbearing manner on the victory. That was artful. But I told her the other day how nobly you had behaved. She was very curious, and comes back to it often. She is just the same ; but you will have to struggle for it. Young Lugard will be here himself.”

“ He will ! ” said Bligh, starting.

“ Yes ; with all the tinsel of the army on him. His father, I can see, is bent on it, and means to find him the brains ; but they are both fools.”

“ Dick Lugard coming ? ” repeated Bligh, thinking to himself very earnestly. “ Is he going to stop with them ? ”

“ Yes. You think that is a great and unfair advantage ? ”

“ Well—” began Robert, smiling.

“ Well, it is one you shall have also. Mr. Gay has asked you. There is a lord coming down—a man of

great influence; and your wise head, Robert, can do something there incidentally. The time won't be thrown away you'll see. One day in the world does more than months in a study. Oh,—and this is another difficulty: Lord Bellman's son is coming—that young Chimeleigh—and I know *that* is what Mr. Gay is thinking of."

"And, mother, *you* want me to struggle against all these influences. Absurd!"

"Let me hear of no difficulties," she said, rising and beginning to light her lamp. "In the number of candidates is safety. With all the love of folly, girls of our time have *nature* in them still. As I told you, I can see the reign of money will go by. The thing is not such a rare or wonderful thing after all. Penniless girls are married for their beauty; why not penniless men for their wit or talents?"

Her lamp was now in her hand, and its light played on her face, showing its rather stern lines all lit up with a soft pleasure.

"I feel happier and lighter to-night than I have done for long. Do you know, I feel as I did at the hotel on the night I entered Bath. Others would have felt dismal and low-spirited; but I was full of heart; and, my dear Robert, I am so happy you are with me. Do you think your old mother—for I *am* your old mamma—a dreadful schemer? No, you don't. Getting on in the world is not scheming: it is living honourably, and getting the fruit of the talents God has given us. The fools and propriety-people—who *can't* get on, but would if they could—turn up their eyes. Good-night, my dear boy. We shall have Diana yet!"

And she walked solemnly, as she always did, to the door. Then she looked back, and nodded to him full of confidence. The clock on the chimney-piece had "tinged" twelve with no solemnity of chime. It was like a crying child wanting to be taken to bed.

Robert Bligh remained behind, and began to walk up and down and think—a habit of his every night before he went to bed. With this motion he had grown to like

thinking over everything, planning things for the next day, and, besides, giving himself a little *divertissement* at the close of the day's hard labour by setting little pictures from memory before himself, and, what was better, painting in more gorgeous scenery for the future—the next best entertainment to dreaming. Many an hour had he given to this little relaxation, and had seen himself high in glory on the bench, or lower, pleading and gaining dramatic causes; and very often too the dust-clouds rising from the law-books cleared away, and a delicate and bright figure rose up before and entertained him, for the boy's love still lingered. But, as the reader will have guessed, there was a greater passion than love in this gentleman's heart. His mind was of a highly Scotch turn, and to the belief that advancement in the world was his inherited creed everything was to bend.

In this waking dream he heard the clock give a smart ting—"one!" Then he took his lamp, and walked away softly to bed.







## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE RIVALS MEET.

**T**HE *Calthorpe Mercury*, which had many subscribers in that and other adjacent towns, and kept its eye a good deal on the movements of the gentry, soon discovered what was going to take place at Gay Court. "We understand," said the *Mercury*, "that the spirited proprietor of Gay Court intends shortly celebrating the birthday of his accomplished daughter and heiress, Miss Diana Gay, by a series of festivities at his hospitable mansion. Several guests of distinction are expected: among others, the Right Hon. the Lord Bellman and his son, Viscount Chimeleigh; Mr. and Lady Margaret Bowman; Mr. Lugard and Richard Lugard, Esq., 1st (Du Barry's Own) Hussars; Mr. and Mrs. Crowder; Mr. Bligh, barrister-at-law; and others. We understand that Mr. Gay purposes throwing open his princely mansion for a grand ball to the neighbourhood in honour of this most interesting occasion." The *Mercury* "understood" all this, and much more, almost as soon as the scheme had been conceived in the mind of the princely owner. We may wonder how *Mercuries* discover these things? Have they an instinct? or through what channel, above or below, do they attain to their mysterious knowledge? It is known, however, that Mr. Dawkins, footman at Gay Court, on a recent

visit to Calthorpe, had been met by a shorthand gentleman, and handsomely treated at the Greyhound Inn.

Miss Diana was in great delight at the prospect. She spent a good deal of time planning and superintending arrangements. A careless remark of her father's, to the effect that there was a good deal of responsibility on her little shoulders *now*, had sunk deep into her mind. The bedrooms lay a good deal on that mind and shoulders ; and her forehead contracted a little as she thought, with almost painful anxiety, how so many were to be fitted up with becoming magnificence. Her difficulty was with Mrs. Sims the housekeeper, a lady of generally tightened aspect—in face, figure, and dress ; and the tip of whose nose, at moments of contradiction, quivered like a dog's. Of this person our Diana stood in awe, feeling utter helplessness in her presence ; and, knowing the lady's indisposition to recognise or even see any responsibility on Miss Diana's side, that young lady, with much diffidence, prefaced all her wishes with a "Don't you think, Mrs. Sims—" which, according to all known laws of woman, was but inviting cold shakings of head, and a plain "*not* thinking," from a person consulted. She was allowed her way as far as suggestion went ; and then the familiar, with a smile of pity, said, "Oh, never do, miss ! You may leave it hall to me, miss."

Very grand and extensive preparations were made under more competent superintendence ; but her father, carrying out the good-natured fiction of Miss Diana's labours, would say as she came down, "Working on still?—another hard day for my little poodums"—he had a whole vocabulary of these terms of endearment—"she is doing wonders, and becoming quite the mistress of the house." Kisses were of course freely lavished in return for this compliment. Her father showered guineas on her ; but her current coin with which she repaid him were kisses ; and these payments were given with the abundance with which a sultan would bestow purses of gold.

Still there were matters which Mr. Gay did not exactly

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trust to that "little head." The two or three best bedrooms were handed over to Messrs. Debenham, the eminent London upholsterers, for redecoration in sumptuous style, not at all in snobbish compliment to the lord who was to occupy them; but such restoration had been put off and off since the days of the late owner, who had partially taken the matter in hand, and then let all decay a good deal, and this seemed a good opportunity.

A *cook* of eminence—a perfect Knight of the Bath, if that answers to a *cordon bleu*—was coming down, with an aide-de-camp or two; and it seemed also a suitable occasion to inaugurate the services of THE NEW BUTLER, *vice* an ancient, useless, and hitherto irremovable retainer, who had held office during the last forty years. That tyrant, for such he was, was aghast at this characteristic ingratitude; made no remark on the matter to Mr. Gay, but excited much terror in Diana's heart, by repeating, half to himself, half to her, "Wait until to-morrow—or next day!"

One morning, when Mr. Gay was out, Diana was told that there was a gentleman wishing to see her in the drawing-room; and that announcement obliging her, as it always did, to dart to the glass, adjust hair-bows, &c., with a hasty but sufficient adornment, she fluttered down to see the stranger. It was a tall banker-like-looking gentleman with a gold guard-chain. He was carelessly turning over a photograph-book. He bowed to her. "Miss Gay, I believe? Mr. Chewton, please."

Diana remembered the name, and started with surprise and a little alarm. This caused her to "blurt out" a little ungraciously, "Oh, the new butler!"

He shivered a little at this calling a spade a spade, but bowed with dignity as one who would have said, "I see you don't mean it." He said, "I have just come from Sir Wilson Towers, and I left the kessel this morning."

He saw that this had great effect on Diana; but it was only his manner.

"And—and," she asked in embarrassment, "what would you wish to do?—what do you want?"

"Oh, I have jest come—I wished to pay my dooties to the lady of the 'ouse on arrivin',—only the usewl thing; the 'ousekeeper all in good time, m'm. With your leave, we shall put over business till to-morrow. I should be 'ardly equal to dooty to-day, after the journey and all that. I a-sewer you, miss, I felt it a good deal, parting with Sir Wilson and his family. He came down with me to the door, and his last words was, 'Chewton, we part as man and man, with feelings of mewtewl respect on both sides.'"

Diana, as this gentleman withdrew, felt a little chill. She to be mistress!—give *him* orders! Alas! at best she felt she could but submit propositions to him for his opinion and discretion.

Later on that day, which was about a week after the portrait had been presented, Mr. Gay came home boisterously. His hearty voice was heard in the hall, and rang upstairs like a bell. "Where is she?—where's popsy? Are you there, duck? Come down; I have got something here for you."

Diana came running, and saw a strongly-built gentleman, with a fair beard, standing beside her father.

"Who's this fellow?" he said, laughing. "Guess him as you would a riddle. Come, popsy, you know him."

"Ah, to be sure!" said Diana gaily, and putting out her hand; "Robert Bligh! But you're so altered!"

"Oh," said her father, "there's a cut-and-thrust for you!—unless you add, for the better, eh? Come, say that, or you'll make the man miserable."

"Well," said Diana reflectively, "I do think for the better—a *little* for the better."

"There's for you! He's to dine with us; so see that we have enough to eat, poppet; we depend on you. I assure you, Bligh, this young lady is beginning to keep the house in order. Only for her, we'd be all at sixes and sevens."

This reminded Diana. "By-the-bye, papa," she said,

"there was a gentleman—I mean the new butler—here."

"A gentleman!—the new butler! Ha, ha, ha!" And Mr. Gay burst into one of his rough laughs. "Where's the fellow? Towers wrote me he was a bit of a swell, but a good servant. Where's the fellow?"

Bligh was looking at her with his thoughtful look. It was some years since he had seen her, and he could not but be struck with the change—the ripening and more womanly air, the little tinge of colour in the cheek. As usual, she had on her trinkets.

"What are you looking at me so for?" she said, half seriously. "Do you know, I think you have forgotten me?"

He laughed. "No; only so much has happened since; that is, so much *aw* has happened, for that has been my life."

"And you are coming to stay with us? I hope so. There is going to be all sorts of fun."

"Yes," he said; "I came over to say that I would."

"Then it is a long time since you have been here. Would not you like to see the garden and improvements, and *my* garden and new summer-house?"

"Oh, immensely," said he.

She cast down her eyes demurely. "Then shall I ring and tell them to send the gardener to take you round—he knows all the names, you see, so much better than I do? Or, if you would prefer it, I could get my bonnet—"

The reader will see that our heroine had a kind of faintly mischievous turn, and was subject to little fits of this sort—most perfectly natural—which gave her all the piquancy that was her charm.

Mr Bligh, looking at her in his thoughtful way, answered her after a moment: "I should like the gardener—and Miss Diana also."

Mr. Bligh therefore, for all his learning and bookishness, did not take everything *au pied de la lettre*. The young lady got her bonnet, and presently both

went away with all that old "common form" of conversation known so long as "going to look at the garden."

Bligh then went home to dress for dinner. As he entered the drawing-room he saw there were others present; and Mr. Gay, greeting him heartily, as though it was a month since they had parted, took him by the arm with both hands, and led him up.

"There's some one here you should know," he said. "This is a day for old friends. Now, who's this? Look at him."

A slight, fair, good-looking young man was standing by Diana, and looked up. "How do you do, Bligh?" he said warmly. "You remember me?"

Bligh said, "What, Lugard! I am so glad."

Mr. Gay, with Bligh's arm still captured, stood listening to the greeting.

"I say, popsy," he said, "shall we ever forget the last time these two gentlemen met?—I say, Doctor, come over, and I'll tell you as good a thing as you ever heard."

This was to a clergyman, who, to such an appeal and to such a treat held out, could scarcely grudge the trouble of walking across. Mr. Gay had him by the arm too.

"The best thing, Doctor,—as good as a play. Five or six years ago we were at a school on the day when the lads were showing off. You know what they do at Wheeler's?"

"To be sure," said the Doctor; "the exhibition-day."

"Well, Di was in the garden after all was over, and she came on these two, at it ding-dong—a regular duel. High words had passed, and they were giving each other the satisfaction gentlemen expect. Ha, ha! That was the way they parted."

Bligh smiled. "I have often laughed over that," he said.

Mr. Lugard smiled and laughed; but the laugh was a little forced. "I believe it has been said again and again that college victories or defeats are no signs of success in after-life. But it *was* funny, Miss Diana catching us at it so hard and fast. Boys will be boys, you know."

"That *used* to be the case," said the Doctor ; "but boys *will* be men, is the new version, it seems to me."

"I can guess what the battle was about," said Mr. Gay in good-humour : "that little coquette there, as she was *then*, had been trying on some of her tricks—this end of the plank up, then down. Oh, don't tell me ; I was watching—eh ?"

Bligh struck in eagerly, "No, no ; *she* had nothing to do with it ; no, indeed !"

Lugard laughed. "I see Bligh is just the same down-right fellow he was—blurts out the truth always, and nothing but the truth."

Dinner was now announced. As they went down, Lugard took the other's arm.

"Well," he said, "so we meet again here. I am so glad. To tell you the truth, I did not expect to find you here. I was told you were grinding away up in town, and that you could not spare half an hour."

"It is very kind of you," said the other warmly, "to say so ; and you are not more glad than I am. I was obliged to come here to refit. I had been overdoing it a little."

"Sit yourself there, Lugard," said Mr. Gay ; "and you, Bligh, on this side. Now we'll see what Mons. Frangsay has done for us. But now, what *was* at the bottom of those fisticuffs ? for there is a mystery among you all."

Diana tittered, quite delighted. "Yes, papa, there is ; and you are *not* to know."

"I was just going to tell him," said Lugard ; "but shall not now, without your leave."

"Come, popsy, say the word ; don't let the poor old man famish for want of a secret."

"Well, then," said Miss Diana, with an air of reflecting anxiously, "he may know."

"Why, then," said Lugard, splendidly, "it was all my fault, every bit of it. The fact is, when he said he had got the prize to give pleasure to Mrs. Bligh, I said something about running to his mammy and an old woman. I had never seen Mrs. Bligh then, who, as I have heard,

is anything but an old woman, and is a very charming person. So it was a mere general bit of impudence on my part ; and I mean to go over to-morrow to pay my respects, and in that way make as handsome an apology as I can."

This generous *amende* excited great admiration. Diana looked over with a little awe, as she always did when there was any chivalry displayed ; and Robert Bligh's face glowed with pleasure.

"Indeed you must come," he said ; "and I know you will like her."

The dinner was very good and dainty. The artist had not put forth all his strength. He had just given a hint of what he could do, as Meissonier would take up a pen and sketch on a napkin. His palette was not spread as yet.

"I declare," said Mr. Gay, "our friend the *chef* has done very well. Try some of this, Doctor."

Such a delicate dinner, with nothing in the gross, no joints that should have cranes to swing them on the table, but with everything choice. How it stimulated spirits, conversation, everything ! There was an alacrity, a spontaneity. Every eye glanced round the table joyously. In every heart there is that epicure corner. Lugard was in glowing spirits. He began to tell of his regiment—its doings, not in the *official* way with which the dining-out story-teller unfolds his stores, but with an easy rambling. Little descriptions and sketches are more entertaining than legends with "points" and "jokes," even though they be "uncommonly good things," or with more vainglorious people, "the best thing you ever heard." He told them of Spring, and of Gilpin, their inimitable regimental humorist.

"Oh," said Diana enthusiastically, "I am told he is the most diverting creature—that he can make you die laughing."

"He ! On the contrary, he is the most wearisome fellow. I wish to Heaven we had him out. He's got a suit of old clothes he bought from a man in the street, and he goes about doing a knife-grinder at houses, the



stupidest exhibition—really, I am always ashamed of the the man.”

Diana looked grave at this account, which differed a good deal from the more enthusiastic one given by her friend “Kitty.” So differently do things strike different minds.

“That was the man you were talking of having here, dear,” said her father. “Never mind, we’ll have him over ; he’ll amuse the servants.”

Then Mr. Lugard gave other sketches and details of their barrack-life, which were gay and interesting : how they were still going on persecuting that young child Poole, filling his boots with wet sand, making apple-pies in his bed, and other such annoyances. The last and most ingenious device was perching a small tin can of water just over his door, with a string connecting it with the door-handle ; so that when he came home at night in the dark, a watery Jupiter descended on his head in a shower of block-tin, and hurt him severely.

This was Mr. Bligh’s classical illustration, which, however, was only “taken” by Mr. Gay and the Doctor.

“That,” said Lugard, “was pushing things too far ; for the poor boy’s head was all cut and bleeding, and he was quite stunned, and, though I had put sand, and his own tooth-brushes mixed, in his boots, I think this was not fair ; and so I told the fellows. But Spring and Cadby are always at this childish work ; and last night the poor lad came running into me for protection. So I told them I wouldn’t have it, and it must be stopped, or I’d bring it before the colonel ; and so I shall.”

Magnanimous Lugard ! protecting the weak, helping the helpless !—so we may suppose he appeared to our Diana. And it must be said he told his little narrative, not with any view of showing off, but just to amuse the company.

“A most proper feeling on your part, sir,” said the clergyman warmly, and does you great credit. The young man might have been driven to self-destruction.”

Lugard then continued rambling pleasantly. Now

about Colonel Rigby, a youngish colonel, who presumed on his good looks, and fancied the ladies were sighing for him. "Which indeed they are, I believe," added Lugard.

And Mr. Gay says on that : "I don't know a pleasanter berth than that of an unmarried colonel. He is positively hunted, my dear. Even the married old stout weather-beaten fellows with great (I beg their pardon) 'whacking' wives, like big troopers in their own regiment—you remember 'Mrs. MacPhairson' popsykins ; I think she could swallow up my little woman altogether—we know what swells they are."

So Lugard went on, bringing out his little military figures and scenery with very good effect. The scarlet side of society is seductive enough : it has a theatrical air ; its gold and colours and *fanfares* are grateful to the eye ; and the air which the consciousness of their trappings inspires, the haughtiness, *insouciance*, or superiority which is *de rigueur* with the military all the world over, excites curiosity and respect, if it does not attract. It is the most spectacular of professions, and beside it the colours of the others seem to fade and grow dull.

Robert Bligh listened for a long time with great interest to these details. Lugard rose in his spirits, grew more voluble and communicative in his way, laughed loud and long, and became exuberant. No wonder the Doctor said, as he was going that night, that there was a *fund* of nature in that young man that was sure to carry him over every difficulty in life.

"And he will fly them, too," said Mr. Gay, "without touching a stone."

But suddenly Bligh, who was naturally a silent man, and always required a sort of privacy and encouragement to bring out his gifts, looked over at Diana, and saw her stealing one of her half-shy, half-reverent looks at Lugard ; and this look, so full of admiration for such gifts, roused him from his inaction. The image of Mrs. Bligh, sitting up at home, with her lamp beside her, waiting for him to enter and tell the whole progress of the night, presented

itself. He knew that even that moment, though she was with her book, her thoughts were wandering over to that little dinner, and speculating "how Robert was getting on ;" or she had put her book away, and was walking up and down impatiently, with her hands joined behind her. So, waiting for the next opening, he struck in with something about his *own* profession. But our Bligh had not that taste for "shunting" conversation off on to another line, which indeed requires a pointsman of the very neatest touch.

"I don't know why," he said at last, "that taste for practical joking should belong to the army alone. We don't find it in either of the other professions. There must be some special reason."

Lugard was just opening off with a sketch of a certain major who had dined with them not long before, but was checked by this remark.

"A bit of philosophical inquiry," he said. "I see, Doctor Syntax still goes on."

"Doctor Syntax!" said Mr. Gay; "what about him?"

Diana knew the name and tittered; and the Doctor saying it was a most humorous bit of buffoonery, though a little profane in parts, she laughed still more.

"Only a bit of old school-days," said Lugard, smiling from the feeling that he was "leading the house" still. "Shall I tell? We used to call our friend there Doctor Syntax, he was so much wiser than any of us,—a term of respect, you see, and from all the little boys who were behindhand with their lessons running to him to help them."

"Well, and I think it was uncommon good-nature of him to do so," said Mr. Gay heartily; "and if so, it was a compliment."

Miss Diana's face, which was like a delicate weather-glass during a conversation, and reflected every change, was here turned to Bligh with deep sympathy. For with this young lady the story of anything generous or good had always the deepest interest, and stirred her heart.

Then Lugard said quickly, "Indeed that's true, and I myself have come to him in my distresses and difficul-

ties ; though I *believe*," added he, with a sly look round the table, "I showed him a little too much of the weak points, especially during the last quarter—eh, Bligh? He was so quiet and shrewd, we never dreamed he was using his eyes all the time."

There again was a point against that gentleman ; for though the speech was in jest, somehow it seemed to help to explain that old defeat a little.

Bligh coloured. "I should scorn such conduct," he said warmly ; "even as a school-boy I always told the little I knew with just the one object—just to help those who came to me."

"Surely I *said* so," said Lugard, "and said it as handsomely as I could. My dear fellow, you don't want it illuminated and engrossed on vellum, and signed and sealed—I admit the old obligations. Mr. Gay, you didn't meet Bateman the general? That reminds me. He requires everything by letters : in fact we call him Old Put-it-in-writing. I assure you I have asked him a thing, and he has agreed ; and when I was going away he calls out, 'By the way, you'd better put that in writing.' And if you didn't, he'd say afterwards he had no official knowledge of it. It is quite common to hear our fellows : 'Where are you going, Cadby?' 'Only just up to Old Put-it-in-writing.' Ha, ha ! I beg your pardon, Bligh ; you're not a bit like him : and I didn't mean to say you were. But somehow, what we were saying just suggested Bateman."





## CHAPTER IX.

### FIRST CHECK.

**N**OW the young officer caracoled gaily and pleasantly on his light pony, and Robert Bligh saw that his solid conversational cob could not do more than amble heavily after. So with a sigh he felt he must be content with this indifferent progress. After all, "Common Sense" and "Very-well-informed" are dowdy, housekeeper-looking women, whom we may respect for their virtue and propriety ; but they are dull company compared with the flashy grissettes whom we call Nonsense and Fun.

"Come, Lugard," said Mr. Gay, "what name did they give you? You had one as well as the rest—out with it. At my school we had a fellow they called *Ratstails*."

Diana laughed at this notion. "Oh papa !" she said.

"No invention, I assure you, popsy.—Come, Mr. Bligh, what was his?"

"Not a very pleasant one," said Lugard in a sort of affected confusion. "*Pan*—what do you think of that, Miss Diana?"

"Odious !" said the young lady. "What does it mean?"

"You remember that," said Lugard, appealing to Bligh. "It was Pan at this end of the playground—Pan here, Pan there. I used to be sick of it."

"But what was the fun of it?" said Mr. Gay; "was it after the god—the fellow with the pipes?"

"No :—short for *Panther*. The fellows said I used to spring like one. Absurd!" Here, again, he affected deprecation. But still the epithet was complimentary and even romantic, holding the associations of the glossy, brilliant coat, his lithe figure, and graceful spring. So here Lugard "scored" once more.

Now the ladies retired; that is, Diana rose and fluttered to the door, smiling and tittering, and then passed Mr. Lugard, who was holding it open, and who had a mysterious interview with her—his head outside in the hall, his figure inside with the gentlemen, and who came back to his seat smiling. Then the wine went round, and they talked wisdom and politics—which are of course wisdom—and soon introduced "the finest horse in the kingdom," an animal surprisingly common, and which every one has seen or heard of a good many times in his life. On the shaking out the folds of this equine banner a cordiality and unanimity set in which no other subject could have invited.

"Bellman and I were schoolfellows," said Mr. Gay; "and I am so glad to have him here. I want to show him we have a horse in these parts; for he is rather sore about a couple he got from a dealer, and which belonged to poor Freeman before he broke up. With all his money—and he was liberal enough of it, God knows—poor Freeman would do you in a horse if he could."

"Lord bless you!" cried Lugard in his impetuous way, "every man—the greatest saint among us—feels inclined to do that, if the opportunity comes."

"Dear me!" said the clergyman in a soft surprise, "how amazing that is! The old Adam, I suppose—always the old Adam."

Bligh had his brow bent and his expression of thought on.

"It is *very* curious, all that," he said; "and I am sure quite just. I wonder could it be explained in this way, that defects in a horse are so much of a moral sort that

the warranty can be stretched a good deal ; just as about human character, and—”

“Oh, listen to Doctor Syntax !” said Lugard boisterously, and standing up to put his hands on Bligh’s shoulders. “See him coming down on us with his hard logic. Now he was going to say, like the way mammas will tell nothing about the temper, &c., of their daughters, but warrant them to any extent. For shame, Bligh.”

“Indeed—” began Bligh, smiling gravely. “Putting ladies and horses on a level—such a coarse idea ! I suppose, sir, the next thing will be to have regularly-appointed ‘Vets’—matrimonial vets—who for ten-and-six will lift up girl’s lips, put their fingers on their teeth—Oh, shame ! Ha, ha, ha !”

“Ha, ha, ha !” laughed Mr. Gay, with his strong lusty laugh of enjoyment. But Lugard was gone. This was a specimen of his “spirits,” and he was fond of boisterously constructing such far-fetched sets of opinions for friends and giving them some such absurd development.

“A cheerful fellow,” said Mr. Gay. “No fear of his not getting on. He’d walk up to the biggest swell of them all, just as he’d walk up to a cannon ; and the first requires more courage, I can tell you. The two of them upstairs will be knocking up some fun, I can tell you.”

Bligh had looked uneasily after him as he left the room. He could not do the same. Mr. Gay would have stopped *him*, and brought him back ; or, if he had persisted, would have thought it “free and easy rather, in another man’s house.” There are happy people in the world, who have the art of getting doors opened, obtaining admission into private grounds, reserved seats, &c. : they have *manner*, which is better than a purse, and saves certainly fifty per cent. of their income. But now Bligh joined in these praises with infinite warmth.

“Oh, he is sure to get on ; he is so ready—never at a loss. It was just the way at school. Not one of us could say the things to the Doctor he could.”

“Ah, yes ; ah, yes,” said the clergyman in his plaintive

voice ; "very true. There are persons in our profession of—er—that sort, who, I am afraid, use those means to push themselves."

"Ah, we could name a few, eh?" said Mr. Gay—"Doctor P., and our friend A., the vicar of M.? Help yourself:—no more? Come, come, we must finish this, and no excuse."

When they at last went up to the drawing-room, they saw Miss Diana and Mr. Lugard far off in the next room at the piano. She was busy teaching that gentleman to play a little *patois* air she had picked up abroad. Lugard was playing, and the young lady was standing by, correcting and chiding with mock impatience. Lugard, indeed, knew little more than his notes, and could only "strum."

"Here," he said, starting up, "sing it for the company—come."

The Doctor came softly and slowly gliding in, with that smiling diffidence which gentlemen assume after dinner. "Oh, do let us hear it," he said.

"Come, popsy, tune that sweet little fiddle of yours," said her father. "Sing us the *Sarabande*."

"Oh, papa," said Diana, "you know I don't sing before people, and Mr. Robert Bligh such a judge."

But she began nevertheless, with a very small, child-like touch, and, it must be said, a little straggling in the harmonies ; but still the air was pretty, and the voice very sweet :

"O, la Sarabande,  
J'ai la vu danser !"

At the end Lugard good-humouredly took Bligh by the shoulders.

"Come, you severe fellow, what have you to find fault with in *that*? Can you pick a flaw, a demurrer—anything against the rules, eh? If you only saw him, Miss Diana, with his judicial eye on you, waiting for a false note."

Diana tossed her head until her trinkets jingled again. "He is quite welcome, I am sure," she said.

At last they were going away.



"Recollect, Doctor, you are booked to us on Monday—our first day—no excuses. We shall have a little fun. Of course I only say it in the name of popsy here, who is mistress and empress, and all that.—Eh, Dinah, duck, won't you invite the Doctor?"

Diana made a very graceful and queen-like curtsey, and said gravely, "I hope the Doctor will honour us with his company on Monday next."

Lugard and Bligh went home together part of the way. Lugard had his "trap," and would drop his friend.

"Here is a good cigar for you too," he said; "and I want to talk to you as we go along. I can drive and talk. What did you think of this evening? Charming house. I like the very atmosphere of it—even that rough, good-natured, and genuine father. Nothing old-fashioned about him too, except his heartiness and kindness. And that piquant lively little Diana; though I don't know why we call her little—she's not little. By the way, I don't think you enjoyed the night so much. You had some Contingent Remainder or knotty point running through your head. I watched you several times. She said so too."

"Not at all," said Bligh, a little warmly. "You are always saying something of that sort—that I am judicial, or wise, or full of common sense, when I am not thinking of such a thing."

Lugard laughed and touched his horse complacently with his whip.

"I thought that was all in your way, and that it was the highest compliment. Well, I must mind for the future. Don't you find her improved, and yet much the same as she was when we saw her last? I am glad she has not lost that native—that *naïveté*. Native *naïveté*: come now, you're going to say that's cacophonous—isn't that the word? But I forgot. Do you know, my dear Syntax—you must let me call you that for old times and old schoolfellowship—"

"To be sure," said Bligh, good-humouredly; "only not before people. It makes one a little absurd."

"But it will slip out. I say, what an enviable position that girl has!—not a trouble, not a shadow of a care—everything is happiness, everything at her feet—a devoted father; houses, horses, happiness; lands, tenements, and hereditaments, eh, Doctor?—all hers. Do you know," he said suddenly—"shall I tell you a little secret? My father, who is as clever a man as there is in the three kingdoms, has laid it out; and I believe will manage it. There, sir."

"Manage what?—not Miss Diana!"

"Yes, the very thing. I shouldn't object seriously, if I laid my mind to it regularly—in fact, the foundation is laid. Girls of her nature—light, airy—they flutter on to us, and our gaudy leaves and petals, like butterflies on to flowers. There's poetry for you. I mean we soldiers, with our golden clothes, &c., *have* a pull—you know it. I confess I should like a pretty trinket."

Lugard felt his companion move impatiently beside him.

"But are you so *sure*, Lugard?" he said. "I don't think you quite know her character. Under all that which you call lightness I see a great deal of sense and principle, which only wants the occasion to come out. A pretty trinket!—she is much more than that, Lugard. I never like to hear girls spoken of in that way."

"Oh my!" said Lugard; "this is quite heroic. Pray who spoke of them in that way? You see I was right in saying to her that you are so practical; you *do* take things *au pied de la lettre*. I see I must weigh my words with you, Master Bligh."

"No, I didn't mean that," said Bligh. "Only I think you suppose the thing to be easier than it is."

"That of course is to be seen," said Lugard, coldly. "I may as well tell you that I intend taking up the business seriously; so I warn off all intruders. Ha, ha! Tell your friends, my dear Doctor. I know what Gay's notion is in getting Bellman here, and his donkey of a son. But still, if mademoiselle set her heart on a thing, I rather think he must let her have her own way. My

father has managed more difficult things than that. Here's your gate, and I see a light over the wall. Your good mother is sitting up for you—to *hear all about it*, ha, ha! But mind, not a word about our secret. Mind, I'll count on your help a little, old boy. Good night, old fellow; take care of yourself!"

Robert Bligh was set down at the gate, and as he rang, one of those rapid sweeps of thought, which stretch as far as what the Eastern saw in the tub of water, passed through his mind. The conclusion was, as the door opened, "It is absurd, hopeless, ridiculous!—a mere mother's dream; the idea of *my* slow-moving mind hobbling after his brilliant soul. It is the most childish notion in the world."

As the door opened, he saw his mother standing in the hall, tall and shadowy.

"Come in, dear," she said; "sit down and tell me all about it—about *the first move*."

Robert felt a twinge at his heart. Mother and son sat down together on the sofa.

"This is new life to me, waiting for you in this way. After all, what is there like life and affection, and flesh and blood? I used to try and persuade you that books were the only things having no malice, hatred, or unkindness. The worst is, I only find this out with every day I grow older. Now, Robert dear, report."

She was looking at him anxiously.

"Well, you know, mother," he said, taking her hand, "nothing could be done on a first night."

"Nothing?" she said quickly; "everything! It is the things that take time which never succeed. That pottering is the sure way to fail. You have double the chance when you go at it at once. But you have not lost time. I know your quiet, sure way when you have the ground to yourself. Come, begin at the beginning; tell me the dinner—I always like to hear that."

Bligh turned slowly to her.

"You see," he said softly, "I had *not* the ground to myself."

"Why who—" she said, starting, "who was there? tell me—quick."

"Only Lugard—Dick, my old schoolfellow."

"What, the officer? Oh, I see! Well of course it couldn't be helped. Now tell me about it."

"My dear mother," he said quickly, "you know what you were talking of before I went out. I did not take it up perhaps so warmly as you wished. But I see now it is hopeless—not to be thought of in any way."

She rose up slowly from the sofa, and said hastily—

"So I see you have done nothing—attempted nothing! Is that your spirit? Is that what you would dare tell a client in a desperate case? I am ashamed of you, to come back to me with such a child's story. What are you good for? Whom are you afraid of? An empty-headed subaltern—because he is dressed up like any strolling actor, and is daubed over with gold lace? Heaven help us!"

She was walking up and down, stamping about with her hands joined behind her. Her son was not at all surprised at this burst! he was accustomed to it.

"You know, mother," he said "I have not the gifts for this line. As far as a brief goes—"

"Yes, a wretched few guineas—yes, there is the narrow view! When can I teach you to get rid of this miserly view? Precious years of your life wasted in scraping a pittance, when you might by a single stroke win all. What does your history tell you? Has it not been the game of all the great men? Your wretched tradesmen and manufacturers like Crowder, this money-grubbing spirit may do for them. But where are they at the end of their life? My dearest Robert," she said, her tone softening, as she seated herself beside him, "I seem to speak harshly, but it is for your good; I want to rouse you. So I suppose you were put back by that coxcomb? Tell me the truth."

"Why," said he, "it was so, mother. I have not the knack. He is so much readier. I am too 'heavy,' and—and—I can see she cares for him."

And *you* are imposed on by such things! I am astonished at you," she said, again starting up and beginning to walk; "why, a skilful man would—Ah, I see what I must do! My great lawyer-son wants confidence out of his court or chambers. He must have his old mamma at his elbow to whisper him. I must take it in hand myself, I see."

He smiled. "That would be no use either, mother."

"You don't know; you must *try*, my dear boy. You don't know the first principles. Whatever the woman may be, whatever she thinks of you, she will be flattered by a man's preference, whatever that man may be. Is not that something to start with? Fools at a ball skulk by the wall, and say, 'She has too grand partners. She will not look at me if I ask her.' If she sees *you* think so, *she* will think so. The wise fellow goes up straight and confidently, and is taken. I tell you, Robert, we have a basis here, which no one else has, and which I cannot tell you, at least for some time—There!" He started. "Yes," she said, an advantage over all comers. But I see the old mamma must step in. I suppose I must go to Gay Court, and stop there a while."

"Do, mother," he said eagerly; "we should be all so glad."

"Not all," she said, smiling, "as you shall see. At any rate, we must start again. Now to your bed."

And with a smile and an air of exultation she passed out of the room, leaving her son, who, as usual, remained a long time in thought.





## CHAPTER X.

### THE HUNT.

**N**OW at last had come round the great evening, and the *Calthorpe Mercury* was able to announce, —could there have been a decent excuse it would have added, “BY SPECIAL TELEGRAM,” —that the distinguished visitors had arrived at Gay Court. Previously they had been “favoured” by a private view of the new state bedrooms, now being got up “in the most costly manner and the most exquisite taste,” by that enterprising monster firm, Messrs. Debenham. The chief one had been “sumptuously upholstered” in what they described as *bleu-de-roi tabouret*—another in chintz “of the rarest finish.” In short, our reporter—who had been introduced surreptitiously and shown over the whole by a pantry-friend—was quite dazzled.

Mr. Gay laughed loudly as he read his *Mercury*.

“These poor devils must earn their crust, I suppose. But where do they get their fine names? *Blue de roi*!—why, it is only the ordinary blue stuff they hang up. Of course, I shall have a fine bill to pay.”

At last the *Mercury* was enabled to announce, “All the distinguished persons who have been invited to Gay Court to celebrate an interesting anniversary have arrived. Among those at present enjoying the sumptuous hospitality of the large-hearted host are, the Right Hon. Lord

Bellman ; the Hon. Mr. Chimeleigh and suite ; Mr. and Lady Margaret Bowman, Canning Bowman, Esq., of the Foreign Office ; — Lugard, Esq., of Burton, Richard Lugard, Esq., of her Majesty's Hussars ; Robert Bligh, Esq., Mrs. Bligh ; Major Spring, and Miss Crowder of the Priory. It is rumoured that still more distinguished company is expected, and that Gay Court will be the scene of festivities rivalling in brilliancy and beauty the most gorgeous dreams of the 'Arabian Nights.'"

"Pish !—gorgeous dreams of my grandmother !" said Mr. Gay impatiently, as he read. "I wish to goodness they'd leave us alone."

The reader will see that this quotation, though it does come from a country-town "print," saves us a world of description, narrative, &c., and has, in fact, carried us over a handsome space of ground.

Gay Court was really bright with all its new finery ; the *bleu-de-roi tabouret* was hung ; the French cook was ready ; Mr. Chewton was, as it were, standing to arms ; and that Monday evening Mr. Gay's private omnibus had taken away from the station the noble persons, Lord Bellman and his son, Mr. Chimeleigh and suite (no more than a single valet). The select and distinguished party had assembled at dinner to meet them, though not the full strength of the company, who were to come and dine on the next day, after the hunt was over.

What was the secret of this excitement about my lord ? He was but a very ordinary pattern of peer, and in the county we had already the Earl of Cumberley, Lord Killeries, and Lord Bayswater, whom we might draw on again, discount, and cash when the occasion served. The truth was, that now, after a long term of receivers, Court-of-Chancery trustees, the Freeman estates had come into the market. For a long time back, the *Mercury* had been hearing that "a distinguished nobleman, remarkable for his success in bucolic pursuits," had been making inquiries about the Freeman lands ; and presently the *Mercury* began to hint that, though matters were not "ripe," and it might be "premature" to ventilate the

name, there could be no harm to say that it was Lord B——n whom popular rumour pointed to as likely "to come among us" very soon. And very soon the same authority had discovered that all was well-nigh complete, and that the Freeman estate was about to change hands.

The only drawback was, that there was no residence on the estate ; so that there was no prospect of having so desirable a resident as Lord Bellman for a neighbour. But they did not know that Mr. Gay was equally eager to secure the new-comer ; and this might have been a good deal of the secret of all this fuss and preparation ; for he knew that if his lordship was pleased with the hunting, and fancied the place, he was just the man to give orders to have a good house built, and come and live there.

It was Tuesday morning, and the company were dropping down to an early breakfast, spread festively and artistically under Mr. Chewton's own eye. That gentleman had stood many minutes at the bottom of the table, with his head on one side, and that "hown hye" closed as if he was looking through a telescope, but was satisfied. In its own way, he thought a table was a thing of beauty, which, indeed, everything done on the most perfect principle is, to a certain extent.

It was early—a fine fresh hunting-morning. It had rained a little overnight, as his lordship made his august progress in the private omnibus. Hunting-men had gone to bed uneasy lest this might turn to a sharp frost ; for the glass was not satisfactory. However, here was the morning itself—a gentlemanly, well-behaved, proper sort of morning, with the ground just soft enough to be velvety, and not soaked into a fatal bog condition. From the row of tall parlour windows the thick evergreens and the rolling banks of grass looked rich and green and refreshed after their pleasant bath. The meet was to be at eleven o'clock, on the lawn ; for his lordship wished to have a long, hearty, and satisfactory day.

Both sides of the table were lined, and it was a gay.



cheerful, inspiring scene, a little different from the interment-like gloom that sometimes attends a country-house breakfast. What would the reporter of the *Mercury* have given to be allowed to peep in, even to enter now and again with the cream, game, &c., in the undignified disguise of a waiter!—a thing no pantry interest could accomplish. Yet he was not a hundred yards away, hanging about the lawn with the rest of the crowd. A whole column in the *Mercury* will by-and-by give us ample details of “THE MEET AT GAY COURT.”

Now we see Lord Bellman beside Diana, who is presiding with infinite grace, and not a little confusion, and looks so tiny and quite fairy-like in her habit, as she stands up and fills out tea for every one: for Mr. Gay, in defiance of Mr. Chewton’s respectful protest, will *not* have that cheering beverage made wholesale, hotel-fashion, at a neighbouring side-table, and served round as if it was an *entrée*.

Mr. Chewton faintly introduced the name of a “Lord Northfleet,” when he had “gone down special for one of his lordship’s open-ouse parties;” but without effect.

“I like that putting away the joints out of sight,” said Mr. Gay to Lord Bellman; though, mark my words, we’ll be coming back to that as a fashion; and we’ll have the ladies crying out, ‘How nice it is to see the saddle of mutton, and have your slice cut off before your eyes!’ But the tea-making is the only link between the host and his guests; and my little pootens there wouldn’t give it up for the world, would she, popsy?”

“I think it such fun, papa,” said Miss Diana, filling away hard. “Come here, Mr Bligh, and hand that down *yourself* to Lady Margaret; and if you spill a drop—”

Lord Bellman was a tall, good-looking nobleman of about fifty, with black sleek hair divided in the middle, and a pointed American beard. He had been a very handsome man in his time, and was still remarkable for his fine even rows of teeth. He was a country lord; ardent about stock, butter, and turnips, with which he mixed up hunting and Whig politics. Every farming

man remembers the year when his lordship's brindled bull, "Great Tom," took the cup at the All-England Show, beating the Earl of Wickfield's beast—considered unmatched in size, weight, and all brutish qualifications. Every one will remember his lordship's speech on the Labouring-Classes Dwelling Bill, which he brought in himself, and passed through the House of Peers, but which, when it went down to another place, was strangled. He had at one time formed part of a Ministry, and had been at the Board of Trade ten months. But the short-horns and the fine hunting country in which he lived drew him irresistibly away; and no man can serve those three agreeable masters, sporting, farming, and politics, at the same time. Politics is the narrowest-minded and most greedily selfish of the three. But he took them up fitfully and almost alternately: his present hope and aim was to get an earldom; it being said "he had strong claims on the party;" and he would have been very well content had he become Earl of Belltowers.

Mr. Chimeleigh was also present—of about five-and-twenty-years old; an unhealthy-looking youth, with a very sharp pink nose, of which some of his friends, with more liveliness than courtesy, said "he could slice melons with." He, too, was a politician—a "sucking" one, those same free friends remarked—and did not care in the least for the short-horns or the farming. He could hunt genteelly; and his father said "he was a knowing young Whig, and would feather his nest one of these days." Older members of the party were accustomed to prophesy wisely in the same spirit; and the country paper, in a sort of divine *afflatus*, said it was easy to see that he was "marked out" as one of the rising men who would be at the helm of the State. Poor helm! how many clumsy fingers have closed upon that well-worn piece of timber! He spoke very little, eating his breakfast in a measured business-like way, as through a small section of public affairs; and was fond of taking senator-like airs. He was to go into Parliament; and there was a little borough in the great hunting country, where it was thought his father's interest could have

placed him ; but his health was bad, and doctors had prescribed a two-years' voyaging and travelling to make him strong, before entering on political life. Some of the friends said of him, "Clever young man ; head like a book ; chapter and verse for everything ; *He'll* cut a figure." While others—the free friends—said, "You might put all Chimeleigh's brains into a little gallipot, and have room to spare !" Both opinions were extreme and a little extravagant.

Lord Bellman was a most voluble talker. Conversation with *him* was practically making a speech. He had his glass to his eye.

"That's you, I see, Gay. Who did it ? Too much of the red, I should say. Do you know it's uncommonly hard to get a coat done ?—because it *is* the coat merely that is done. I know a young fellow, exceedingly promising, who is coming up in this hunting way, and knows how to do a horse's head. If I had known, I could have got him, and he'd have been about the same price. He did Pownall for the Crewe Hunt, on his black cob ; quite a Vandyke thing, I assure you."

"Well, I'll tell you the reason they had *him* to do my figure," began Mr. Gay.

"Not but that's very fair," went on his lordship, screwing his glass into his eye ; "very fair indeed, too fiery though—far too fiery ! What's this—post, eh ?"

Mr. Chewton was entering with a beadle-like air ; his hands full of letters carefully sorted, and which he considered he distributed with infinite grace and courtly effect. He came formally to the top of the table, where he laid down a packet, nicely assorted in sizes, beside Lord Bellman, with a half-whispered and most obsequious "My lord." He looked round the table, doing the same to every one. In this office he was considered, by his dependants and admirers, to be unmatched.

Lord Bellman glanced at them one by one, finishing his tea, toast, &c., as he did so ; and only indicating the probable contents by side-long looks, pursings of his mouth (tea-cup being suspended), and upliftings of his

eyebrows. At last he pitched on one, opened it, and read it.

"Well," he said, "this is from Stephenson ; everything clear, all plain sailing ; submitted it to counsel, made searches, and all that. We're to sign at once."

"What? Freeman's estate?" said Mr. Gay, heartily. "I'm so glad ; I'm delighted to hear it. I didn't like asking you, for I was afraid ; and I was wanting to see how you'd like the place.—Di, popsy, listen to this !—May I tell her?"

"Now, what is it, papa? If it's a secret, I won't keep it."

"Only about Freeman's estate, Miss Diana, which is all virtually my property now. I am to be one of the powers that be of this county."

"I am so glad, Lord Bellman ; but you must promise to build a house, or we shan't care for you at all."

"Oh, I shall come down occasionally to look after the people, get in my rents, and all that."

"Indeed you must do no such thing, Lord Bellman. We won't have any absentee people spoiling our county, getting all they can out of it, and doing nothing. No, no," said Diana, tossing her head ; "we won't have you on those terms at all."

"Diana, popsy ! D'ye hear her lecturing his lordship—bringing him to book, like the—"

"I am quite serious, papa," she went on, composing her lips into a grave expression ; "I don't approve of it at all. Property has its duties as well as its rights ; and you know those poor people in Ireland—"

"Oh, what have we here?" said his lordship in great good-humour. "A Radical—a real Radical ! For shame, Gay, to bring up your children in this way !"

"I think," said Miss Diana, "the Radicals are the nicest people in the world. I hope we shall have a republic in England before long ; it would be such fun. Do you recollect, papa, the handsome young man we met in the train going to London, and who told such pleasant stories? He said he was a Radical."

"Yes," said Mr. Gay, who was inclined to run into

grave narrative on any hint ; " I assure you, as agreeable and pleasant a fellow as I'd ask to see ; quite a gentleman, I assure you, Bligh—manner, dress, bearing, information—everything."

" And he had eyes, hair, nose, mouth, and a real head, hadn't he, papa ? " said Miss Diana, with a sly look to both sides of the table.

" Just listen to her ! " said Mr Gay, delighted. " Did you hear *that*—hitting at her poor old daddy ? Well, after that I'll say no more. God bless me, it's getting late ! See the country fellows looking in the window ?—hang their impudence ! Diana, my pet, you should keep your friends in order."

" They're very forward," she said, and fluttered over to the window, which she opened.

The company followed her slight figure and the folds of her habit, which streamed behind her.

" Go away, Tom Holden," she said. " I am very angry with you ; you have no business to be there ; I won't have it ! " Then she came back again. " See how they obey me ! " she said.

The party broke up. In a half-hour there was a curious scene in front of the house. It seemed as if there was to be a meeting, and people were assembled to hear addresses. There were a couple of open carriages drawn up ; an Irish outside car ; at least a dozen horses being walked to and fro ; and a whole crowd of retainers, who pretended to be of use in some way. From the windows of Gay Court looked out many faces, gentle and simple—but more simple—which, with white cap and a broom or two faintly visible behind, betrayed the suspended labour of the housemaid. There was plunging of hoofs and crunching of gravel ; the broad steps were crowded with many figures, and lighted up with abundant and cheerful scarlet ; while the air was perfumed with the morning cigar, and made melodious with the light chatter of voices. The meet was half a mile away, at what was called " t'ould Garse Cover." The young men are pleasantly leaning against the piers of the steps, when sud-

denly out strides Mr. Gay, in his scarlet coat and white breeches and shining boots, to take the command. Behind him come the distinguished guests; and our Diana told later with many a titter how she had distinctly heard from the crowd, "Theer, thot be the lard." That nobleman was considered to affect an almost unsportsmanlike appearance in his dress, which was only a black cut-away coat, with buff-leather breeches and short black boots. Mr. Gay on public occasions became energetic and vigorous.

"Now, look alive," he said, "and bring forward Father John!" And in a moment a strong brown creature appeared, well drawn together, short legged, and with small head, but fast solid quarters, and the well-bent hock which is the true merit of the hunter. A groom led Father John forward, who advanced with a wise and composed demeanour, with no pricking of the ears or startings—a sober and a wise man, who knew he must reserve himself for the day's work before him. In his own native land Father John would have been attended as he walked with many a muttered "Ah, begorrah! see that now!—that's the fine crather intirely!"

"Oh, indeed," said his lordship, drawing on his gloves and measuring him critically, "He promises well."

In a moment he was in the saddle, "sitting like a true man," said some one in the crowd; then gathering up the reins and ambling off in the regular hunter's jog-trot.

Then came D'Orsay, very satiny in his coat, but wild-eyed as usual, and foolishly pricking up his ears and starting at every sound. Diana tripped down the steps, daintily holding her habit. Bligh was at the door, looking with interest at the proportions of Father John—for he had an eye for a horse as much as for a point of law. He did not see Miss Diana looking back for the expected attention. Suddenly she whipped her skirt a little impatiently.

"Mr Bligh!—well, sir, am I to climb up myself?"

He started and came down. Miss Diana laid her hand on the saddle. Bligh stooped; but D'Orsay was

fretful and out of humour that morning—the bustle and arriving of horses during the night had disturbed him and put him out, as it would have a human dandy who had come home from a ball. Bligh in his eagerness, and perhaps awkwardness, to retrieve his inattention, swung up Miss Diana a little too quickly, and D'Orsay swerving away, she came to the ground again.

"You did that on purpose," she said; "you are thinking of something else."

A cheery voice called out behind, "My dear good Bligh, I saw you do that. One would think it was a volume of Chitty you were putting up on a shelf. But let me now; please do. Don't be restive."

There is a precious sort of obstructive manner which will be good-humouredly obstinate, and puts away such pressure as this. Others without this charm have to give way or hold possession in a rude boorish way. Bligh made a faint protest, and chose the former.

"That's a good man. Now we'll try again. D'Orsay is scared with all this company. Poor fellow! Let us soothe him first. Poor fellow!" And Diana's delicate hand and a great buckskin glove were travelling over the dandy's neck with most grateful effect. "*Now* we'll try. And in a second Diana had fluttered up like a bird, and had perched ever so lightly on the small saddle.

Bligh admired her thus, when D'Orsay, now in good-humour, began to move off in a playful canter.

"That's the way to do it," called out Lugard. "We'll teach this lawyer in time. Now," he added, taking his friend affectionately by the arm, "to get our own nags. At these show-gatherings they potter away such a lot of valuable time." This was a favourite method of treatment with Mr Lugard: after he had, as he called it, put aside his man, he made up for it by a profusion of almost blandishments. They were up in a moment. The ladies had got into the carriages and on cars with the non-hunting gentlemen, and presently every one drove away.



## CHAPTER XI.

### THE DAY.

“**T**’OULD Garse Cover ” was in a very picturesque corner of the park, and a green grass coasted by it. All the rustics had taken a short cut over the fields to see the great meet ; and as Lady Margaret Bowman’s carriage rolls along the soft green lane, of which there were some miles in the demesne, she sees among the old trees patches of scarlet flashing brightly, and a general shifting and flutter of colours. It seems as though there was to be a race.

The Calthorpe Hunt has mustered some forty strong—considered a very great meet for that time of the year. It is a perfect cluster of open carriages, with a couple of drags which have “bowled” over from Ironston, and are laden with the ladies of the hunting officers of the Du Barrys, and from beneath the white overcoats of these gallant gentlemen many a shining top-boot emerges. Scarlet gentlemen are tramping to and fro from one carriage to the other ; and here is Miss Diana looking down from D’Orsay, the dandy’s back, on a whole group. She is not unsupported ; for Miss Crowder, with a scarlet feather in her hat and a “stand-up” man’s collar, has cantered up beside her on a handsome horse, which, though of exceeding price, has a manufacturing air, as



though he but represented money, and money alone. Beside him D'Orsay seemed a creature born in the purple. As she cantered up, she must almost have heard from the drag-roof the rather free-and-easy sobriquet "Kitty Crowder" said all but aloud; for such a penalty does this pleasant familiarity with the warriors entail.

"Kitty" was in high spirits. "Where is the lord's son, dear?" she said, looking round. "What! doesn't he hunt? Is he a sneak? Oh, I must know him; indeed I must. You must—there he is with the sharp face. Let's ride over to him, and you introduce me."

Diana hesitated. She had great dignity, and though liking "fun," would speak and draw herself up in defence of the smallest of the proprieties.

"Indeed, I can do no such thing," she said. "He would think it very odd. I hardly know him myself."

"Indeed he would not, now," said Kitty in a loud voice. "You never were more out in your life. Never mind; I'll manage it somehow during the hunt. I'll speak to him myself, and tell him you wouldn't introduce me. You must learn not to keep all the men to yourself, Miss Diana."

Diana smiled. She knew her friend's ways, and was not offended. Kitty had forgotten the matter in a moment, and was scouring the field with her large eyes. Then Lugard rode up, with his father by his side, who was exquisitely appointed, as though he were going to a ball, the delicate feminine toilette and eternal simper being marked on his face. His horse looked as if *his* coat had been carefully brushed and left without a speck. Mr. Lugard looked almost as gay as his son; and when he took off his hat to Miss Diana, his thin hair seemed smoothed and parted elegantly, as if on a lady's forehead.

"This eager man is like a schoolboy, and would not let me lose a minute."

"I am so glad you have come, Mr. Lugard," said Diana; "but look at darling D'Orsay; he is the handsomest creature on the ground."

Mr. Lugard looked down on himself with a simper, as who should say, "You don't count me, I suppose."

Every face was there, from the straw-coloured terrier-dog faces of the military to Mr. Pratt, the gentleman who had pronounced on D'Orsay, and from whose pen the *Mercury* led its readers to expect a graphic account of the day's run. "We may promise our readers," said that journal, "that our valued Venator will limn Reynard's course with more than his usually graphic pen." He came rocking and jogging up to Diana, and said solemnly, "Well, miss, I see you've got *him* out to-day. No, no, no! won't do, miss—wants a little sense."

"You're jealous, Mr. Pratt," said Diana, laughing; then to her friend: "He thinks nothing like that cart-horse of his."

Here now was Featherston, our esteemed M.F.H., coming up with a quick business air, attended by his two aides-de-camp, as though he were about to clear the course. Featherston was the name in every mouth: we had drank his health; we had found fault with him: we had not supported him with the subscriptions. Featherston had again and again said that after "*this* year" he would resign the hounds to a better man; and again and again, feeling deep compunction for so treating a man who had stood by the sport so nobly, we had conjured him to retract; and Featherston had given way. The probabilities were he would "hunt" the Calthorpe pack till he died or was killed.

"Now, Gay," he said, "time's up—we'll turn the hounds in.—Now, gentlemen, look out; it won't be a second's business, for the place is alive with them; and for God's sake, gentlemen, let's have no tailor-riding here, or walking over my dogs, as we had last day with that man-milliner.—Now Tom, in with them."

In a moment the Calthorpe pack, that seemed all wooden tails and ears, and who were the hereditary Sweetlips, Boxers, Nippers, &c., who had an air of eager business, plunged into the cover. Instantly the talking ceased, reins were gathered up, and his lordship was seen

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by the *Mercury's* reporter, who never had his eye off him a moment, to throw away a cigar. There was a crackling and rustling in the underwood of the covert; the white sterns of the hounds are seen among the leaves; Sweetlips, known for "a true note," gives a cry, and we know for certain that the fox is at home. Suddenly, from far to the left comes the cry, "Gone away!" but from a throat as foolish as some of the younger dogs; and at once a "counter-jumper" and some "tailors"—so our M.F.H. described them later—plunged away frantically. Some of the "tailors" proved later to be Major Spring and Mr. Collins.

"Look at those donkeys," said Dick Lugard to Diana; "they've ruined everything!"

So they had nearly, for the field was undecided. Some had gone on, and "Reynard"—his conventional title in all hunting descriptions—having made up his mind to escape, and rushing out through one of his private corridors, had suddenly turned back into his castle.

Our M.F.H. was furious. He came riding up like a general to some cohort that has not done its duty. His words were sharp and sarcastic. Then he collects his hounds, and again puts them in. A sudden roar of delighted agony from the whole pack. There is no mistake this time. General M.F.H. is looking round with his hand up and his eye on the "tailors," who but for that restraint would be at it again. There they go, in a bright dappled stream, pouring, as it were, from an opening in the hedge, spreading over the green grass country, heads down, tongues out, tails up. Now our M.F.H. settles well down in his saddle at the tail of the pack, with his two aides-de-camp; and now the theatrical huntsmen are seen making quietly for the highroad. The carriages begin to roll along the highway, the coachmen flogging their horses to keep up or "head" the hounds off by some short cut. It was a ruck, a delightful rout—schoolboys on ponies, ladies on horses, and bumpkins on nothing at all, scouring along laughing and eager. Now sounded out the cry of the dogs, as they were full on the

open country ; now rang out the horn ; now the cheerful scarlet vanished in a flash, as all—fox, hounds, riders—disappeared round a plantation. His lordship kept well up, and was beginning to be pleased ; only the Irish horse, coming to a low wall, proceeded to take it after the manner he was accustomed to in his own land—“with a top and a drop,” which almost discomposed him. The country was stiff, and yet not dangerous ; and his lordship found himself taken over everything successfully, and grew exhilarated under such circumstances.

We admire and are pleased with everything when in reality we are only pleased with ourselves. Even the praise which in strict fairness was owing to his horse, his lordship took to himself. “I brought him over that fence in good style, I think.”

There was a pink flush in Diana’s cheek, and a brightness in her eye, as she flew along on D’Orsay. D’Orsay took her over everything. Often her father’s voice was heard beside her, gently warning—

“Now, now, tootsums ! Do take care, petsy !”

But when she *would* go on, and, flying over, look back with a laugh, he could only say to his neighbours—

“Well, well, she is a wild child !”

Dick Lugard, mounted on a handsome horse, kept near her the whole day ; he rode well, but according to his character, “going” at everything, and succeeding from sheer recklessness. He got one good “shaking” fall, and rose up, pettishly resenting the affront. As he remounted, he could see Robert Bligh riding steadily on a round-built, close-knit cob ; calmly hunting, measuring everything, and “taking” every jump with a sure and calculated precision that irritated his friend.

“Look at Doctor Syntax ; he’s managed to pick up a horse like himself. Wonderful fellow ! He’s as canny as any born Scotchman. There he goes again ! See, he won’t take that—*there* ! That’s a more comfortable bit.”

Diana, cantering along and looking back, said—

“Well, I don’t know ; that seemed a stiffer part where he *did* take it. Dear me, what are they doing now ?”

They galloped forward ; they had been coming down a hill, at the bottom of which ran a little stream, which a mile or so farther on widened into the great Cale river, famous for its fishing. All had clustered at its edge ; some were cantering up and down its side wildly ; the dogs were running backwards and forwards in deep agitation, with their noses to the ground. Our excellent M.F.H. is cantering this way and that. Had a fellow-creature fallen in, and was he then struggling in drowning agonies, there could not have been so much excitement. Alas, it was a far greater misfortune ! That fatal stream—of which some had had their forebodings—had undone them. The crafty Reynard had either got across, or found a drain, or earth-hole. He was gone : faces lengthened. His lordship looked as he had looked three years before, when news was brought him that his under agent had gone off with two thousand pounds. Even Diana began to pout prettily.

“Nasty perverse thing,” she said, “he does it on purpose.”

A speech that made her father laugh loud, and which he often retailed at dinners.

“Look at our friend Syntax,” said Lugard to her, smiling ; “he has gone off there on a quiet trot, for fear his horse should get chilled. Never forgets the main chance. At school they used to call him Praiseworthy Bob.”

Mr. Lugard did not say “we,” for he never affected any air of familiarity with his friend.

Praiseworthy Bob had in effect ridden slowly up the river, with his eye on the ground, and had turned the corner of a plantation.

Suddenly they heard a cry—a cheerful note. Every one started ; the dogs pricked up their ears. In a second they saw Bligh afar off, and waving his cap. What joy, what delight, what winding of the horn ! It was all scamper and rout. Every one was gone in a second save Miss Diana, who had dismounted to have her saddle-girths tightened.

"Now, Di," said her father, gathering up his reins, and looking out wistfully, for nothing abated his paternal instincts ; "do look sharp."

Lugard did look sharp. "I declare our friend Syntax is quite coming out," he said, as he remounted ; "look at him jogging on in front."

They were not very much behind, but Mr. Gay, on his great strong horse, had gone forward to join his lordship. The course was still by the river, which was widening gradually. Lugard was behind, but making way up ; and Miss Diana said, a little fretfully :—

"I can't make D'Orsay go, somehow. He's in one of his humours to-day."

Suddenly he pricked up his trembling ears and gave a half swerve.

"All right," said Lugard, "it's that bumpkin with the gun in the plantation. But why on earth should he be—"

By the next second the bumpkin with the gun had fired it at some sparrows. There was a plunge, a scattering of clay and stones, and D'Orsay had plunged away like a demon—head down—heels out. He had gone like an arrow. And there on his back—as on some poor shelf—was resting the frail figure of Diana.

Lugard saw this with a sort of agony, and in his agitation actually reined-up his horse. In another moment she was lost to view.

Fox and hunters and hounds were far away by this time. When he could see her no more, he put spurs to his horse, and plunged frantically forward. Another horseman was coming across the field in a diagonal line. He knew it was Bligh, but riding at a pace that the cob-hunter had not exhibited before on that day. Even at that moment of excitement Lugard's lip curled. "He wants to overtake her, the fool !" he said ; then called out, waving his hand, "Keep back ; it will only make her horse go faster ! Do you hear ?" But Bligh did not pay the least attention. "The donkey !" Lugard said aloud.

Meanwhile he had now got to the top of a hill, and

could look down. To his horror he saw that the horse and rider were gone ; and looking down, he could see a small dark object struggling in the river—for into a river the little Cale stream had widened at this place, with a strong violent current. Trees overhung it with crooked branches, seated on which the fisherman watched his line for hours. Hounds were far away across the country after Reynard, who was beginning to show signs of weariness, as well he might, poor wretch. Even Mr. Gay, exhilarated and excited, was shouting “Yoicks !” or “Hark for’ard !” or some such proper cry. For the moment he had forgotten his little Diana.

Before Lugard had recovered, Bligh was halfway down the hill. The other followed. In a moment both were at the edge ; and there, far out in the strong waters, flowing steadily, was seen D’Orsay plunging frantically, with one paw entangled in the habit, and our Diana, her cheek blanched with terror, clinging to his neck with both arms.

“My God ! What shall we do ? I can’t swim ; but this horse can.”

“Don’t think of it,” said the other, hastily. “You will only be in danger : the current is too strong.”

“And what can we do?—what folly you talk !”

“Leave it to me,” said the other quietly ; “I can save her ; but not here : I must get far lower down. Hold on,” he shouted ; “I’ll save you ! Cling to the horse for your life !”

In a moment he had his coat off, and was running hard along the bank. The wretched D’Orsay was still plunging ; but not a cry came from Diana, whose little figure seemed to be now gliding slowly away out of life.

But Lugard’s nature was the same under all circumstances. His lip was curling ; and as his friend rushed away, he said aloud, “Oh, *that’s* his game, is it ? We’ll see !” and putting spurs to his horse, he walked him into the water, and in a second he was up to his middle.

Rushing along the river-side, Bligh got past the point where Diana was still struggling. At that instant she

turned her pale face, and as she saw him pass by—only then—uttered a cry, a scream of despair, at such abandonment. But Bligh had observed a rugged point of the shore which jutted out farther on, and from this he had determined to make his start. He ran out on this, and stripping off his shoes, was in the water in a moment. So cleverly had he calculated the force of the current, against which he could only make way a very little, that it was sure to carry him close to the struggling horse; but almost as soon as he started, another cry came from the unhappy maiden, who saw her coming deliverer turn back and make for the land again.

Almost as soon as he started, he had seen, lying snugly sheltered in a little creek, a tiny flat-bottomed boat, with paddles attached, which was indeed a boat of salvation. After this the rescue came easy; though even here he showed his surprising restraint and thought, for he saw the force of the current, and waited until the unhappy Diana, now releasing D'Orsay's neck and tossing her arms wildly, had passed by some twenty yards; then he let go, and rowing hard, was borne down right upon them.

He called to her firmly and decidedly: "You must do exactly what I tell you, and at the exact moment." D'Orsay was growing helpless, and giving over his plunging. She was saved. Heaven be praised, here was the bank; and at the same moment as he drew his last stroke he heard a faint shout from the bank he had left behind, and saw the whole crest lined with scarlet coats and horses and dogs.

When he had lifted Diana off, and got her safely on shore, she sank down sobbing and wringing her hands. D'Orsay stood there trembling and shrinking, and much cowed and exhausted. It was pronounced in the stables that that wetting had done him a world of good. Bligh tied him quietly to a tree, and then pulling out his little flask from his pocket, put some of the spirit on a handkerchief, and pressed it to her. Suddenly he recollected Lugard, and looked up and down the river, but could not



see him. Then he heard a clatter of hoofs, and Mr. Gay, who had galloped desperately half a mile, raced across the broad country bridge, flung himself to the ground, and had his darling Diana in his arms. A carriage soon came up ; but Diana, every moment recovering from her fright, all wet as she was, insisted on riding home, not on the faithless D'Orsay, who was condemned to disgrace, but on Mr. Bligh's steady cob-horse, who, like his master, would make no mistake.

Every moment our Diana was recovering her spirits. She began to laugh at her limp habit, and put out her small hand to Bligh, with a " Dear Mr. Bligh, how shall I ever acknowledge your kindness ! "

Mr. Gay wrung him as a terrier would a rat. " My dear, dear old fellow, you are a hero, and you've laid us under an eternal obligation. Such a cool, dashing, gallant exploit ! My God ! to think of my little girl being so near danger ! It makes me tremble all over. I must keep a tight rein on her, for she is a little too brave. Did you ever see such a spirit ? No shrieking or roaring, but kept her head all the time. My dear boy,"—and he wrung him again,—“ what *can* I say or do for you ? ”

Now came cantering over the bridge our friend Dick Lugard, who, however, slackened his pace into a walk as he drew near the party. Indeed, Mr. Lugard had a very downcast air, and seemed only half pleased. Only then Bligh recollected about him.

“ How did you manage, Lugard ? ” he said, eagerly. “ What became of you ? You were wise enough not to try the water with your horse ? ”

“ I beg *your* pardon, I did,” said the other, sharply ; “ but I found the current too strong. We had hard work to save ourselves.”

A countryman was standing by, and struck in : “ Oi, oi ! we pull out t' horse ; and 'ard work it wer. 'Twer lucky for he, he got on thot tree.”

“ Oh yes,” said Bligh ; “ I saw that very projecting tree which you got on, and left the horse to swim.”

“ No horse could have made way against such a stream,”

said Lugard, petulantly ; "impossibilities are not to be done nowadays. It is all very well for *you*, who could swim."

"No matter, my dear fellow," said Mr. Gay ; "*you will do it the next time*. Now we must get along. Just go to Lord Bellman, and tell him they will have another fox presently. I must go home with my pet. I hope to heaven she won't get cold now." And he cantered off ; and the hunting-men, seeing it was no more than "that the girl had got a ducking," soon were at work at another famous covert, where Reynard—another Reynard—showed himself almost at once, and was "run into" about three fields off. This was scarcely satisfactory ; but there was another covert close by, and there, with equal promptness and courtesy, another showed himself—Reynard the third—a strong enduring fellow, who got slyly away, and was seen going over the hill. Then followed a run indeed, well 'cross country, far away from brooks and rivers, nothing but good straight hard riding, and hard riders. The pace was stiff, many, "tailed" off ; and after fifteen miles there was only his lordship, Bligh, the clever "limner," the "professionals," and our admirable M.F.H. close up. Ah, we should have read the "limning" that appeared in the *Mercury* : it was considered Mr. Pratt's best effort. Indeed that number of the *Mercury* was a very remarkable one ; for it besides gave full details of "what had nearly proved a melancholy casualty, and had wellnigh cast a gloom over that auspicious day." It was, indeed, a great hunting-day, and towards eight o'clock a couple of splashed elongated horses came walking wearily to Gay Court, bearing his lordship and Bligh—the former in great good-humour, and protesting that he had not had such a day for a long time.





## CHAPTER XII.

### CONGRATULATIONS.

**O**UR Diana was not in the least affected by her accident. She resisted all attempts at making her go to bed and other "coddling;" and I hope that the delicate estimate which may have been formed of her character will not be impaired when it is known that she was induced to take a small glassful of very hot brandy-and-water. She indeed felt herself a heroine, and could but be pleased with the infinite and tender interest her escape excited. Lady Margaret devoured, absorbed her into the folds and windings of the laces, silks, and ribbons which lay about that lady's capacious bosom.

"My dear child," she said, "you are too foolish; so full of spirits and courage—you run your little head into mischief. Oh my! only to think! It gives me a tremble!" And the lady put up her fat hand, with a rustle about her sleeve, to keep out the dreadful prospect. "Now, dearest, you must promise me, when we get you over to Bowman—. I tell you beforehand, I won't leave you. I tell you what," Lady Margaret added with great confidence—"whisper, darling—I'll get the political man to speak to you—our Canning. If he once brings that Foreign Office on you, there's no opposing him."

"Oh," said Diana, "don't then! for I should be dreadfully afraid of him and his Foreign Office."

"Indeed, you need not," said Lady Margaret; "he's as gentle as a girl—to girls. To men, of course—whisper, dear—I'll tell you what he said of you to-day—that you were so like Madame Brenner's daughter—the Belgian minister's you know."

Diana looked awestricken at this comparison.

This was just before dinner—the "first state dinner," as the *Mercury* called it. Again I say, what would that organ have given to have been present? or even had a glimpse from the far-off door? How it would have revelled in pictures of the Gay Court plate, the Gay Court *buffet*, the flowers, rarest exotics, superb liveries, and delicious dishes! Above all, everything characterised by the most refined and exquisite taste—for which department our *Mercury* was a pledge. It was indeed a handsome spectacle; and Diana had found time in her own calm way to overlook and direct matters to her father's infinite satisfaction. Her department was the flowers—and no lady, with such treasures at her command, need disdain the elegant task of so decorating her table. Diana had been led in, triumphantly stepping out. She knew the precious value of dear life now, which she had never done before, and she regarded all these choice things with a sort of affection.

We need, indeed, a little penal servitude and prison fare to teach us the exquisite value of the cheap blessings of light, sun, air, and moving our limbs, even. But she had come up almost with a little theatrical effect to Bligh, and said—

"Mr. Robert, won't you come and sit near me at dinner? I want to talk to you, and have not thanked you half enough."

Mrs. Bligh was close enough to hear this, and drew herself up with pride. She went up to Diana, and took her hands:

"My dear child, you—you don't know what a happy day this has been for *him*. He may go back to his law now, quite content to plod on. For he will always be looking back to this day—"

"So shall I," said Diana warmly, "and shall always think of him."

Indeed, Mrs. Bligh noticed a seriousness and an older manner about her face. And now Richard Lugard was looking on from a distance. He, too, had changed since the afternoon, and was openly ill-humoured. Bligh saw the old look of sneering on his face, which recalled their schooldays. Lugard heard Diana's grateful invitation to Bligh.

"'Pon my word," he said at dinner, "he ought to have the Legion of Honour, Grand Cross, and all that!"

"I hope," said Bligh, "we shall hear no more of the grand achievement after this. It was nothing wonderful, after all."

"Well, you know you had a punt," said Lugard, "and I must say rowed hard to get up."

"But you forget," said Diana, with some excitement, "that he plunged in first, and swam some time against the current."

"Well, I suppose a man that swims will swim. I don't want to disparage our friend or his glory; but as the point has been raised—"

Mrs. Bligh was at the other side, and listening.

"But we must give all credit where it is due," she said, in her low, quiet voice. "What was Mr. Lugard's share?—I have not heard it distinctly; but I hear it was most gallant—swimming across on horseback, and arriving just a minute—"

"No, no," said her son, laughing. "Where did you pick up that, mother? No, Lugard would have been drowned if he had; and wisely took my advice, and stayed where he was."

The look Lugard gave her, Mrs. Bligh did not soon forget. She looked back at him steadily. At that moment a sort of challenge had passed between them; and Lugard understood that he would find what was wanting in the son made up by the mother.

His lordship was in high good-humour with his day; and repeatedly said it was as good a day's hunting as he

had ever had. He considered Diana's mishap merely a little *contretemps*. It reminded him, he said, of what happened to him once when hunting in Datchley country, and which he related very fluently. Though, indeed, there was no river in this instance, public interest and approbation seemed to consider the cases exactly parallel. That reminded him of the Furley Common business, at which his neighbour, that old greedy Kelpie (the Right Honourable Angus Waters, Earl of Kelpie) had been nibbling for years back. He had tried to get an act; but he, Lord Bellman, had met him there. Then he had tried wheedling, and offered to go shares; but he had been met there; he had encroached a little—not much to speak of; but he meant to go on gradually; but if he took in a rood more, Lord Bellman would meet him in the law courts. We all know how pleasantly discursive a person of influence can be on such grievances, and how interested we become in his wrongs, and at what length he can pursue his story; whereas if the “benevolent reader,” or the present more humble narrator, be so prolix—but this is a very trite observation.

Being in high good-humour, his lordship then came back to the incidents of the day—hunted the hunt over again, as the manner of true sportsmen is; showed how, at the ten-acre field, he knew the game was heading off to the right, and he rode up and told the huntsman so; who said “I believe your lordship is right; but Mr. Featherstone will take his own way.” And sure enough, after a quarter of an hour lost, a bumpkin waved his hat, and they had all to tail back in the very direction he had said.

“You lost all that, Mr. Bligh; you were so busy pulling ladies out of the water—a very dashing thing, though, in its way.”

Mr. Lugard (the father) was not far off; but he had not been in good-humour from the beginning of dinner, though he showed his fine and symmetrical teeth very often:

“What I admire in Mr. Bligh is his cool, measured

way of going about the business—looking round to mark every point in the game, as if he was in his chambers at home. I am sure, if there was a fire, he would dress, and perhaps shave, write a note for the engines, put it in an envelope, and gum it down. I can't tell you how I admire that faculty, Mrs. Bligh. Your son is sure to get on. Still, Mrs. Bligh," said his lordship laughing, "I shouldn't like that caution in my case. While he was sealing his envelope, Bellman Towers might be burnt."

"Yes" said Mr. Lugard, showing all his very even teeth, "the vulgar way is to obey the first impulse, and run and get a bucket of water. My stupid Richard would have plunged in at once, without thinking whether he could swim; and your keeper, Gay, tells me he never saw such a place. There's a hole twenty feet deep there; so he might be near paying for his folly."

Diana's eyes wandered with a new interest over to Dick, who sat dejected and sulky, and was not speaking to his neighbour.

It seemed that here was injustice; and for the first time Diana thought she had scarcely acknowledged the well-meant attempt, whose only fault was that it had wanted success. Her soft eyes rested on him with encouragement; and indeed, with all the public, it might seem that of the two portraits just drawn his was the most interesting.

Mrs. Bligh perceived this impression.

"What Robert has done seems to be growing smaller and smaller. It now seems to be a blunder."

"And perhaps will end by being a crime," said Mr. Gay, warmly. "No, no. No political economy in this house, my dear Bob. I know the full value of what you have done, and I shall never forget it to you; and I thank you here, heart and soul, for your gallant behaviour. Else," he continued in a lower voice, "I might have been this night what I daren't think of. God Almighty bless you! and I'll be old-fashioned enough to give your health in a bumper."

Every one filled and drank to him.

Diana, her eyes kindling with enthusiasm, looked to Bligh, and, smiling to him, put her glass to her lips. Dick had to stand up and drink with the rest.

Mr. Gay, had he heard the first part of the little discussion, might have included Richard Lugard in some way. Mrs. Bligh looked over with calm triumph at Mr. Lugard.

Miss Kitty Crowder, who had more tact in small matters, saw by this time that nothing was to be done with the "lord's son," who was dyspeptic, and whose sharp nose seemed to crease with suspicion as he turned to her. She had secured her introduction, to his infinite alarm at this tremendous coming-down on him—so might a yacht be scared by a huge three-decker. She tried him on his "tastes." Hunting—he hated it; balls—he couldn't bear them; country-houses—he didn't care for them; books—they made him ill. And when she was thinking of what on earth she could try him next with, he had abruptly slipped his moorings and got well out to sea in the middle of the room, looking back to her with almost terror.

"What a donkey he is!" said Miss Kitty to herself; and to her private friends later. "What an unlicked oaf!"

To Diana and Lady Margaret she said, "He seemed so absurdly shy. What a pity it was! How did he get on in society at all?" &c. ; with more of such comments, —sour grapery, as it might be called.

Indeed, it was surprising what a net of contending little intrigues was being spread that night in that drawing-room, which, to Mr. Gay's honest eyes, seemed the seat of pure and pastoral enjoyment. Lady Margaret was "enthroned" far off on the sofa; and it was a pity that her busy mind was hampered by that physical unwieldiness of person. She was, as usual, telegraphing mysteriously to Diana to come over and have private interviews.

"Sit down beside me, dearest; I want to tell you something, and we'll get Canning over here."

And that gentleman—called away also mysteriously—had to leave a circle of gentlemen with coffee-cups in



their hands, to whom he was explaining the critical state of our foreign relations. He was a white-faced gentleman, with small round black whiskers and a very large and bald forehead, with a small tuft of verdure growing by itself in the middle with an almost comic effort. He had always "on" a sort of perky smile, from a twist in his mouth, as though, one of his friends said, the upper jaw had been lifted off, like the lid of a china box, and wouldn't fit close again.

"Come here, Canning," said Lady Margaret with fresh mystery; "come close. I have been telling Diana here what you said about Mdlle. Brenner."

"Oh, quite so," said Mr. Canning fluently. "Really most remarkable, in a room I should have gone up straight to her. I was quite startled—was, indeed, Miss Gay."

"There, I told you so, my dear," Lady Margaret said, with a half-mournful shake of her head. "That was at the dinner; Canning said so to me this morning. She goes into the first circle in town; isn't it so, Canning?"

"Oh dear, yes," said that gentleman, with a smile. "Of course: her father's the minister, you know."

"Wonderful, isn't it!" said Lady Margaret, still mournful. "Canning's so intimate. He was at their last grand concert. They tell *him*, dear, all about peace and war, and all that: or I suppose he gets it out of them. They'll make him secretary or minister one of these days."

"Oh dear no," said her son, pulling his tuft a little nervously; "but I suppose I'll get something."

Diana was looking from one to the other with her old expression of awe, and not knowing what to say. Mr. Canning then took up the Brenners again, and spoke very fluently on them. We all have thus a pet "family of distinction," whom we quote and take out to show round, and whose "dinners" we retail conversationally. And so Mr. Canning Bowman continued to tell of the Brenners and the concert again, and of "Christine Brenner," all at great length; Lady Margaret waving

her head in wonder, and all but making that "clicking" sound of admiration which the lower Irish do in country chapels at powerful passages of the sermon. By thus dwelling on his friends he felt he must have satisfactorily impressed Diana that he was a most agreeable man of the world, and as clever and important as the Brenners.

But it was now time to break up. The rest of that night was languid. It was the night of a hunting-day, and the gentlemen were tired. His lordship could scarcely keep his eyes open, and was presently seen with his candle in his hand. People were wishing good-night. Lugard's eyes were wandering round the room, when he heard a whisper: "I am sure you are angry with me; and indeed I deserve it a little."

"For what, pray?" said he, still looking at a photograph.

"Oh, for not thanking you as I ought. You tried to do so much for me, and I seemed so—"

"What nonsense!" said he impatiently. "I did nothing. I wanted cool Scotch caution, or I could have made as good a *show* as others; and yet, I can tell you, would have saved you to-day at the risk of my life, only I didn't know how to go about it. I can't make a horse swim."

"I *know* that, indeed," said Diana, now filled with the deepest interest—even compunction. "I wish I could get you to believe me; but you won't."

After all, our sympathies must go with the warm flesh and blood. The intellect is very well in its way. We may respect the colder and nobler virtues; our hearts are with the stage more than with the senate. And when Diana went up thoughtfully to bed that night, of the images that had figured in that exciting day, her eyes followed the image of the dejected "pouting" Lugard, rather than that of his calm, reflecting, and sagacious friend.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### PLOTS.

**L**ORD BELLMAN was down betimes, as indeed the older huntsmen always were. He had stepped out of the breakfast-room window on to the lawn, and was walking on, when he met Mrs. Bligh. To that lady he wished a cheerful good-morning. He had expressed a high opinion of her sense and wisdom the night before: "Really an uncommon woman, now—a head like a man's!" He was in a very good-humour, and talked to her very cheerfully about that centre of interest to all mothers—a son. Even at that early hour of reticence, with the sun shining brightly, it loosed her tongue, and she told of his deep sense, his thought, and his "law." "No better opinion for his age, they say, in the Temple—which may mean, too, no better opinion for any age—not one of those technical, unintelligible things they write on law-paper; but friends come to him to know what to do, as in a case like the common you were speaking of last night."

His lordship started. "Ah, indeed, now—you don't tell me so! Here he is himself."

And Robert Bligh appeared, walking eagerly, to join his mother. She, however, left them very soon; and presently Lord Bellman, with some "hems," had introduced his "common."

One of the most curious corner-cupboards in the human heart is that where we keep our private stinginess.

The richest or the noblest among us, who will draw a cheque for hundreds without a thought, will yet be eager in some circuitous way to "save a guinea."

"Would you tell me all about it, now, from the beginning?" said Bligh; and for half an hour his lordship "ran on" with many details. Bligh thought a few minutes, and said promptly, "He has no title. The best thing would be to enter on his enclosure and level it. If he goes for redress, he can show no title: he cannot say you have levelled *his* enclosure."

This idea, which at that time was a little new, burst upon his lordship, and was received with delight. He went away, wondering and filled with admiration.

Now the breakfast room was filled again, the hum of cheerful morning chatter resounded. There was to be no hunt that day; but there was to be driving out, and an expedition to Calthorpe.

Mrs. Bligh, vigilant always where her affection was, could hear his lordship, almost aloud, talking with infinite satisfaction of "that clever young man down there," who had given him a plain and practical opinion that morning, which was really worth all that "my professional fellow" would tell him in a week—such a capital plan; and Mr. Gay stooped to one side to get a view of Bligh under this new glory, a most natural motion in a host who feels that a guest's credit reflects a good deal on himself.

Again was Diana, fresh as the morning itself, enthroned at the teapot. Somehow she had nursed her sympathy for "that poor wounded fellow" Lugard during the night, and had come down determined to make it up to him.

It seemed hard to resist her, as her delicate little throat, rising out of the daintiest little collar in the world, seemed to convey the notion of the most perfect refinement. She was nodding to him: but Lugard was still "dark" and indifferent.

"We are to ride to-day, Mr. Richard. Recollect you are engaged to me at two o'clock.

He rose, with an affectation of indifference, to help himself at the sideboard.

"I am so sorry," he said; "but I shall have to go home to barracks to-day."

"Go home," said Diana, "at my festival, and no ride, and the servants' dance to-night? I won't hear of it."

Mr. Lugard senior caught this proposal and frowned.

"Nor will I," he said, "Miss Diana. Master Richard and I will talk this over after breakfast."

"That can't make any difference," said Lugard, with certainly a want of paternal respect. "I must; the Colonel requires me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Gay, with his rather blunt laugh, but he could not restrain himself when he enjoyed a thing. "I know; we understand—sore about yesterday still. I say, Robert, he'll have you out before he has done with you."

Lugard coloured. "I don't understand," he said; "I want to have no one out."

"Oh, you stay here," said his father, curtly. "I wish you and I want you. I'll settle it with the Colonel. These are officers' excuses," he added, lifting up the jealousies from his fine teeth; "they are always 'on guard' when they want it."

"Ha, post!" said Mr. Gay. "A heavy bag this morning."

Again Mr. Chewton distributes the letters with exquisite propriety and neatness, as though he had been brought up to being a sorter from his childhood. Everybody is busy in a moment.

"I declare," said Mr. Gay, "here's news from the borough."

Every one looked.

"Poor old Hodges! I am so sorry."

"Oh, papa!" said Diana, with the teapot suspended in the air from sympathy; "not dead!—poor old man!"

"As good as dead, I fear, my child. Yes, here it's all, from his nephew at Vichy. Got a stroke when taking the waters,—can only last a few months. Poor Hodges!—a true gentleman and a good fellow."

Lord Bellman had been listening, with eyes raised from off his own letter, with some eagerness.

"Can't last long? Then you'll have an election here?"

There was a pause.

"Do you know, my lord," said Mr. Gay—"that makes the Freeman estate something more valuable than it was a week ago. I put in poor Hodges; but Freeman had gone to pieces then. He could always put in his man—always."

"So Lord Bellman," said Diana, "can put in his man. Oh, but I am so sorry for poor Mr. Hodges."

"He often had you on his knee, popsy. But come," said Mr. Gay, dropping his voice, "there's a chance for our young politician, Master Chimeleigh."

"I was thinking of that—the very thing! But, you see, it's so awkward; it comes too soon. Chimeleigh must go abroad, and refit for a couple of years. And if your friend resigns or dies, he could not come back. I'll talk with you after breakfast in the study."

Mrs. Bligh had been listening eagerly. Her dark eyes quickened with intelligence as they rose from the table. She went over to Lord Bellman.

"I hope Robert was of some use," she said. "He had a wonderful head about such matters—in real property, as he calls it—and I am sure, even in this Freeman-estate business, he could give a hint that might be useful."

"God bless me, yes! I have all the papers here; and those lawyers are such rogues! But really you are too kind. He is a young man of remarkable ability: he surprises me for his years."

"An old woman like me," said Mrs. Bligh abstractedly, "is privileged to talk about her hobby. He is my hobby: he will cut a figure one of these days. I have put by a little money to help him in a way he don't know of. No lawyer gets on now without a seat in parliament."

"Ah, yes," said the peer, starting; then, looking at her steadily, "By the way—"

Mr. Gay's hand was on his arm. "Now, my lord, at your service. A cigar in my study, where we shall be more comfortable."

His lordship looked again at her irresolutely, and then went with his friend. He enjoyed his cigar in the study

for nearly an hour, and then went to his room. Later, Mr. Gay, with an excited face, went tramping through the house, asking those he met, "Where's Bligh?—where's Bligh's mother?" At last he met them. "Come here, both of you," he said. "A bit of news, in confidence, that will warm the cockles of your heart. What do you say to Master Bligh's becoming a senator, eh?—too busy, eh? But mum's the word. It's all with his lordship. Hush, hush, now! There's Chimeleigh going to be sent abroad to be tinkered up; and if a smart, clever fellow could be got—discreet, and all that—why, in two or three years he might win a name and character, and end solicitor-general. Such things have happened before now."

Mrs. Bligh's eyes sparkled. "This *is* kind. Why, this is the very opening we were wishing for."

Robert Bligh was reflecting. "It is very kind," he said; "but as to principles, I am afraid that mine and Lord Bellman's—"

"Absurdity!" said his mother, with brows contracting. "There is time enough for all that."

"To be sure," said Mr. Gay. "Put your principles in your pocket, my dear fellow. But nothing's decided. I only give you the hint—you must work it."

When he was gone, Mrs. Bligh turned almost fiercely on her son. "Surely you have a name for wit and sense, and are not going to raise such stupid points as those! For God's sake, I conjure you, be rational, and as that man said, put your principles in your pocket until some one asks to see them. You go to Lord Bellman straight, and say, 'My lord, I regret my principles prevent my being a member for your borough,' and what will he say? 'My good sir, I am sorry too, but really I was not thinking of you.' How would you look *then*? But I hope, my dear boy, we are not to have any follies about political honour, and all that, in these days, when every one is allowed to play fast-and-loose in such matters. Be as honourable and true as you like in private, like a gentleman; but in these wretched politics—no, no."

Her son was silent. She saw she had produced an effect.

"My dear, clever boy," she said, taking his arm, "how proud I was—how I admired you yesterday! You followed out all your poor old woman's instructions to the letter. The girl is thinking of you. I know girls. She will have a romantic interest in you all the days of her life—her preserver. God bless you!—and may I live to see it."

During these hours Mr. Lugard senior had been a little restless, and even nervous. He had been unfortunately placed at the end of the table, and could not well "catch" the election news that was being talked of so far away; but when Lord Bellman came from the study with a specially pompous air, feeling himself now, indeed, about to possess the true touchstone of territorial influence, he met him in the hall, talked a few moments, and then went out with him for a stroll in the garden.

Diana, when breakfast was over, went up to Dick Lugard with the demure, half-guilty manner which sat so well upon her. "You are not going away from us?" she said. "We should be all so sorry."

"That is all very well," said Mr. Lugard. "Much they would miss me!"

"I don't know about that," said Miss Diana, innocently. "I can only guess. But *I* wish you to stay."

"I suppose I shall have to do so," said he; "and you know that I don't choose to get up a row with my father, who has his reasons, whatever they are."

"I know them," said Diana smiling.

Lugard coloured. "*You* do? No, you can't."

"But I do. He is thinking of that seat in Parliament. And do you know," added she, with great wisdom, "I think it would be a very nice thing; and oh, what fun to have *you* for our member! I should ask you for ever so many places—I should indeed."

Lugard was growing eager. "Ah, that indeed!—that would be something. Was that what they were talking of at breakfast? I wonder would Lord Bellman do it, though? Dear me, what a thing it would be! I could always have leave of absence from that odious regiment."



"Yet you were so anxious to get back there this morning," said Diana, with fresh innocence.

"My dear Miss Diana, forgive me. I have been unwell; I have been sulky. Yes; I saw my governor and Lord Bellman going to walk together. They are plotting that, I am sure. The only thing is that—" and his mouth began to look sour.

"What?" said she anxiously.

"The wise man—your preserver—our friend Syntax, who seems now the centre of all attraction, since he put off in his boat to save you. Ha, ha!"

Diana smiled. "You can't forgive him that."

"No," said Lugard, now in good humour, "because I can see he takes airs on it; and I can't forgive myself for not being sharper and more wide awake. Come, now, you *know* he is a sober, book-learning fellow, and that I could buy and sell him in the world?"

"Oh, you mustn't abuse him *now*," said Miss Diana, with infinite coquetry; "I can't have it. I am to be eternally obliged to him, as I owe him my life."

"Exactly," said Lugard, impetuously; "and such an obligation would make me loathe it perpetually. Depend on it he will keep you in mind of it. Yet," said he, despondingly, "the slow tortoise always wins. I am the hare, and will be made a hare. Perhaps they will make *him* a member. I shouldn't be at all surprised if he took that into his head, and used your interest with the lord. You know you are now, as you say, under eternal obligation to him, and must do everything for him."

"Oh, not at all," said Miss Diana, tossing her head. "Dear, no."

"And yet, what would I not give to be in Parliament!" said Lugard, with a very natural enthusiasm. Suddenly he turned round—"There is that girl, Miss Crowder. What a handsome thing she is! Such a fine creature! I admire Kitty—I do, indeed. I must go and talk to her."

And he went off, leaving Diana a little mystified by the change. But she thought very often, with pity, of his natural burst of enthusiasm, and before long had devised a little scheme to benefit him.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE SERVANTS' BALL.

**L**ADY MARGARET BOWMAN, impeded again all that morning in her designs, saw an opening after lunch-time, when she could swoop down and absorb Diana all but entirely. This lady was an enormous eater and drinker—as was, indeed, rendered necessary by her habit of body ; and after such meals her face used to glow and her eyes fill somewhat alarmingly. She carried out a little apology, to the effect that the medical orders forced her to indulge in large draughts of port wine, &c. ; and Mr. Chewton, very soon discovering how matters were, would come privately, and softly fill up her tumbler—under protest and surprise. She had a mysterious communication for Diana.

“Come over to me, dear ; I have something to tell you. You’re driving over into Calthorpe, aren’t you, dear ?”

“I didn’t hear,” said Diana faintly, thinking of the riding party, “but I shall be delighted.”

“It’s no matter ; I was told that was all arranged. I can sit at home and do my work. But what I wanted to tell you was about Canning there, the politician, our *chargé d’affaires et ministre plénipotentiaire*. Dear me, how I remember poor Vuillaume, the French minister, when I and Charles were at Dresden—such attention as he paid us—led me into the ball himself. Well, but Canning—

who's a *regular* Pozzo di Borgo—comes to me just now, and says, 'Let me talk Europe over in the back seat.' I couldn't help laughing—'Europe in the back seat!'—very clever that is. He says you're *the only one in the house* that understands him."

Diana looked a little alarmed, instead of pleased at this compliment, for Mr. Canning had not had much communication with her. But she cheerfully gave up the ride, and Mr. Canning Bowman was dragged from his letter-case and forced into the back seat,—a sudden reluctance which mystified Diana a great deal, she having heard so much of his eagerness to go with them. However, with Diana driving, and he sitting behind, he tried to make the day as agreeable as he could, "talked Europe," or rather "Baron Brenner," with great fluency; Lady Margaret all the while taking half-mournful side-looks at Diana, with a slow shake of her head, in astonishment and wonder. This was all her contribution to the conversation, save now and again, a "Canning tell us about the Baron saying you were a *Tallyrandiste* of the first water."

And Mr. Canning with an "Oh, nothing," started off and told "the anecdote," which was really comprised in that word,—the Baron having merely said he was a *Tallyrandiste*.

When they came home from the drive, Diana found his lordship in the study, busy with his *Times*. Her plan suddenly darted into her head. She sat down beside him, and began a little speech.

"Now, Lord Bellman, I want you *so* much to do something for me,—a little favour; if you *can*, that is."

His lordship looked down on her good-humouredly.

"My dear Miss Diana, command me; that is, provided it is not to get a place for any one."

"No, no," said Diana eagerly; "it's quite another thing. You know to-morrow is my birthday, and papa and I have determined that no one is to give me a present, or anything of that sort. But I will take one, Lord Bellman, from *you*."

He was a man of the world, and kept a lot of smiles by

him of interest, enjoyment, &c., which he could fit on as occasion served ; but this introduction alarmed him a little.

"Now, I'll tell you," said Diana, getting closer to him in a coaxing way ; "there's poor Richard Lugard,—a most honest, fine fellow, whom we all like here,—and he has set his heart, I think, on getting a seat in the House."

"Oh, I see ! And he has sent you to canvass. 'Pon my word—"

Diana coloured. "No, I don't mean that," she said. "But one would be as good as another, just for a little time."

"But," said the peer, "what's to become of our friend Bligh—who saved you, too?—isn't this rather hard on him?"

"Oh, as for *that*," said she confidentially, "I can explain all that. You see he is so sensible, and steady, and clever, he can get on any way ; whereas poor Dick requires help. Robert Bligh can wait ; but Richard may never get such a chance."

In short, the young lady pressed the matter so ardently that she at last prevailed, not knowing that Mr. Lugard the father had had a long talk with his lordship in the morning, during which he had mentioned a few considerations that rather shook his lordship's purpose : that young Bligh had a long head and a deep one, but was too wise to be pliant ; that he was full of those advanced Radical opinions and crotchets—ballot, household suffrage, &c., and was just the man that might turn round on his patron and say, "I am a trustee for the people : I was wrong in accepting on such conditions ; but now that I am here, I feel that I have a superior duty to remain here." "Not," said Mr. Lugard, "but that he is a most honourable fellow ; but these crotchets make slaves of their holders." His lordship was a good deal alarmed at this view ; said he'd give no positive assurance, and would hold the matter over.

That day there was to be another "state dinner," and various neighbours had been invited, chiefly hunting men. The stout, short Mr. Pratt, whose *chronique* was to excite

such a *fureur* in the *Mercury* a few days hence, was invited, and found himself treated with distinction and respect, especially by his lordship.

Hunting is the true democracy, and, like the death it sometimes leads to, levels all distinctions. Perhaps it has an aristocracy of its own, even though it be a kind of "shoddy" sort. This gentleman was consulted obsequiously, and his replies hung upon with admiration.

Diana was in infinite spirits. She had gone up hastily to Lugard and whispered him before dinner, and that whisper made him start and colour, and say, "No ; how good of you !"

"I am an angel, am I not?" said she, and tripped away to take Lord Bellman's arm. "Oh, do you know, pa," she called out during dinner, "that illness of poor Hodges is not a secret? They were all in a fuss at Calthorpe, and told us in the shops that he had resigned already. "And do you know, papa," she went on, with that charming serio-comic manner of hers, "do you know we saw in my friend the Radical saddler's window an address to the Radical electors, my friends, not to engage themselves?"

Lord Bellman looked a little grave. Mr. Gay would have looked grave too, but he was busy helping, and thinking of something else.

"Ah ! there's my popsy for you ! She keeps her eyes open."

About nine o'clock was to be the servants' ball in the large oak hall. This festival brings an exquisite pleasure to the ladies of that condition, and all the young maids were met during the day flitting through the house, looking for dresses. The "word had been passed" to friends at neighbouring houses, and the housekeeper, Mrs. Simms, had formally invited various "gentlemen" who were acquaintances ; and by particular desire a special invitation had been sent to a London footman and a town valet of distinction, who were known to be on a short visit at a house close by. These gentlemen, finding themselves rather *ennuyés* with the simple pastoral pleasures of the

country, had promised to look in. So might Major Marjoram and Captain de Lacy, of the Blues or Coldstreams, negligently promise the almost suppliant Mrs. Price, giving her little suburban party, and eager for the presence of these warriors, to "carry it off."

It was "Stanley," Lady Margaret's own "body-maid," who had met these gentlemen, they having visited at Bowman in their professional capacity, and being sent into the housekeeper's room for refreshment, had delighted that select circle with their easy London manners and lively "hanneckdoats." Stanley, a fresh, good-looking tire-woman, was supposed to have made an impression on the somewhat *blasé* heart of Mr. Baker, who had said in a loud whisper to his friend that she was "dew-sidedly well-fevered."

No wonder it was looked forward to with interest, this little festival, giving the world of below-stairs an opportunity for playing at ladies and gentlemen, and to thus grow a little more refined.

Diana took the greatest delight in this coming entertainment. With her own maid Fanny, a pretty village-girl little older than herself, she had been busy for such time as she could spare from the great people. She had tumbled out all her dresses, dug, and dived and delved in trunks to fetch up something that would set off Fanny to the best.

"Here, Fanny, you must have this, and this too. And here, take these earrings—I don't want them. And mind you come to me when you are dressed. And there—there's a wreath too ; I've only worn it once."

"Oh, miss—the beautiful French flowers that came from Paris ! I couldn't—"

"Oh, nonsense !" said Diana. "I'll make papa get me a whole box next week. Mind you come to me, and I'll put them in."

And so Fanny did, and, in a pale-blue silk of her mistress's and a muslin "body," she was the belle of the feast.

At nine o'clock the distinguished party of immortals

descended from above. They found the company already clustered at the door, and a little shy before their betters.

The floor was cleared. The two fiddlers and the "bass"—a village orchestra were "in high fettle," and tuning and tuning, as at that famous Fezziwig dance, "like fifty stomach aches." They were rather squeezed in a corner, but could discourse spirited if not very correct music.

Then the young ladies—"in service" I mean—who had been clustering together timidly at the door, debouched quite a cloud of muslins and silks and flowers, all with their gloves too, save Mrs. Simms the house-keeper, an old conservative as to such vanities, and only lending herself to such frivolities.

Then Mr. Gay, without the *condescension* too often applied on these occasions as a sort of salvo, advanced to Mrs. Simms and begged her hand for the first dance. That lady curtsied with a native dignity, and accepted.

Then Diana went across to Mr. Chewton, who had been expecting the honour, and with a pleasant laugh invited him to dance with her. That gentleman indeed showed his training and knowledge of the world by his calm and almost elegant manner.

Diana, thus secured, went over to the gentlemen and whispered to them with a business air—

"Now go and be gracious, and ask those poor girls; and *don't be condescending.*"

Mr. Richard Lugard was in great spirits that night.

"Give me your orders; I'll do whatever you wish. Come, Bligh, sir—none of your aristocratic prejudices *here!*"

And Mr. Richard, by way of noble abnegation and self-sacrifice, flew over and offered his hand for the first country-dance to my lady Margaret's pretty maid, one of the belles of the room.

Bligh, always a little shy and thoughtful, even in such trifles, felt awkward in going up to a cluster of servants whom he did not know. But Miss Diana, already taking her place in the dance, fluttered over to him.

"Oh, *won't* you do what I ask?" she said, timorously. "I dare say this all seems very trifling to you, and I know we ought not to ask you. But," she added, with a little mystery, "*they all expect it*, just for to-night and at Christmas; and I only ask the dance."

Bligh was looking at her with the air of being a little hurt at these rather gratuitous suppositions.

"I have no wish," he said gently, "to shirk my duty, or any duty you put on me. But I did not happen to know any of these young ladies."

He saw Diana's little maid, and went over to ask her. But another gentleman was beforehand with him; Mr. Baker, with curt and blunt promptness, which he had seen a good deal of in London drawing-rooms, "cut in" before him, and cut out the prize before his eyes.

"Beg pardon," he said, "but hengaged to me."

My Lord Bellman's "hown gent" saw Mr. Baker wink at him; by which he knew that this was only a clever invention; but Bligh felt the awkwardness of debating with a valet about his claim to a lady's maid, and withdrew. There was infinite tittering at Mr. Baker's cleverness. Then the music struck up, and all plunged forward with vigour and agility, and Mr. Gay's partner, Mrs. Simms, got into motion with a grave activity that was almost amusing. Diana, *vis-à-vis*, was laughing—laughing to every one all round as she "set" to Mr. Chewton's portly person.

"Now then, no shrinking—real steps—work away!" said Mr. Gay, cheerily, as he pranced by, warming to the business.

Bligh was looking on a little ruefully, and yet amused and interested.

"She might, I think, be a *little* more kind—after what has passed."

His mother saw him "moping" in this way, and came over to him.

"I hope, dear, you are going to enjoy yourself like the rest. And engage her in time before all the others. Come—you know, all these are little points in the game."



"My dear mother," said he smiling, "you are so sanguine. What *is* the game?"

"My dear boy, when will you believe altogether in your mamma, without her having to explain everything? Why, even in your standing here, dancing with no one, there is an inferiority. It looks as if you had tried and *couldn't*. See! Look round. Every one of *your* standing has succeeded in that. I know it is not worth anything; but still it is a point lost."

Bligh reflected a moment, then said, "You are always wise, mother, and think of everything." He went up to Diana. "There will be dancing, I suppose, later for *us*? And, if so, would *you*—?"

"I shall be delighted," said she with a smile. "Do you know you are beginning to surprise me?—a grave barrister like you coming out in this way! I shall be delighted—that is, *after* my dances with Mr. Lugard."

"What, engaged already!"

"Yes," said Diana, nodding, "since dinner. The early bird, you know.—Thank you, Mr. Chewton, we had a very charming dance.—By the way, Mr. Robert, I want to speak to you privately and confidentially. Suppose we take a walk round the room."

Mr. Bligh was delighted. His mother's fond eyes followed them with approbation as they walked. Miss Diana was setting out that most captivating of all the little "properties;" that *moue-moue*, confidential, mysterious, and persuasive look.

"Now," said she, "Mr. Robert, I want you to do me a favour—a *little* favour. You know my birthday is coming on."

"To be sure," said Bligh; "anything you like."

"But you must promise me."

"Well, I do," he said, smiling.

"Well, you must know there is a great scheme on foot about this Calthorpe election, and I was speaking to Lord Bellman this very evening—canvassing him, as I may call it; but he told me that *you* were thinking of it."

Bligh looked at her, mystified. "Well," he said, "and what does this mean?"

"Well," she said, almost turning round to look into his face; "what we want is this: there is poor Richard Lugard here, as we all know—a little unsteady, you know, and wants application."

Bligh was looking uneasy and doubtful.

"Now, *you*," she went on eagerly, "are *sure* to succeed. Oh! you are *so* clever."

"But," said Bligh, quietly, "what is it you wish me to do?"

"Well," she said, hesitating, "to let him get in, if possible, for Calthorpe. You are so wise, and full of sense and knowledge and learning,—you are sure at any time; whereas this is the only chance *he* may have. If you said a word to Lord Bellman—"

"I declare," said Bligh impatiently, "this is rather too much. I am getting tired, Miss Gay, of being always told I am wise, and sensible, and all that. It seems to me to be rather a drawback than anything else. And let me say, too, it is a little unkind to make such a request of me."

"Unkind!" said she, starting, "Oh no, I didn't mean it so."

"I am sure not," he said, more gently; "but you don't know what you ask or the difficulties of the thing. It seems to me that I am to be called on to give way to Lugard in everything; and why *you* should ask me above all others—unless you are so particularly interested—"

Diana drew herself up; a tinge of colour came into her delicate cheek.

"I suppose you mean after yesterday, Mr. Robert Bligh? *You needn't remind me of it.* I am quite sensible of the obligation, and always shall be, I hope. You will not find me ungrateful, I assure you. But I meant no harm in asking you what I have done."

His blue eyes turned on her with gentle surprise and grief.

"Was I dreaming of such a thing? No, indeed, I

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assure you. No one thinks less of that poor service than I do. But, with all respect to your wishes, I am not called on to give way in this manner to Richard Lugard *all* my life long. We happened to be at school together; we are neighbours here; but that is all. We are not on such terms of romantic friendship. Besides, there are real difficulties in the matter, that you can have no idea of. The thing has gone further than you think; I am half-pledged as it is."

"But I tell you," said Miss Diana, coquettishly, "I have made it all right with Lord Bellman."

"There are other things besides Lord Bellman," said he, "but I am not at liberty to say more now."

"Oh, then, you really refuse me the only little favour I ask you! Very well; it is no matter—none in the world, Mr. Bligh."

"You don't know the difficulty," said Bligh, gently; "something has occurred in Calthorpe which has made it almost impossible. Then there is my mother, whom I must consult, and who has her wishes; just as you would do what would please Mr. Gay, your father. And as I say—as for Lugard, there is no reason why I should make any sacrifice for *him*, as—"

"Oh, hush;" said the young lady in a frightened voice.

A curling lip and flashing eyes were looking down on him.

"No sacrifice for me, Mr. Robert Bligh!" he said; "who wants it from you? Pray do not think of it. I don't require it from you or from any man. What were you talking about, pray,—where was I concerned? Would it be impertinent to inquire? Ah! there is the music. Come, Miss Diana—our dance. You'll tell me all about it. 'Pon my word, Mr. Robert is getting quite lofty in his speech since he rowed out in a boat and rescued a lady."

"Now you mustn't talk that way," said Diana, half-smiling, but greatly relieved, as she saw that Lugard was not going to make a noise or a quarrel about the matter.

"Ah! no, I won't complain, then," said he. "But I

warn you, you'll be reminded now and then of D'Orsay and that splendid rescue."

Diana could not help smiling, but became grave again in a second, and shook her head, and looked over a little guiltily at Bligh, who all but knew what they were saying of him. This sort of polite faithlessness is based on a sudden confidence and good humour between two persons: and a hundred times in this little state of *effusion* we cannot resist fraying, as it were, just the edges of our dear friend's character. Then the two went away merrily into the heart of the dance. Diana was in great spirits, but she was not *quite* pleased with Mr. Robert Bligh—why, she could not say; yet she found herself repeating Lugard's remark, "that he had merely rowed out in a boat," and that she would be reminded of it often enough.

But we should now have noticed the two London gentlemen, who were indeed making an effect—Mr. Baker and friend. In dress they were scarcely distinguishable from the persons they served, having small bouquets and white kid gloves. It was seen before the night was over that of Mr. Baker Miss Stanley had made a conquest. He, as it were, appropriated her; and a neighbouring footman, hitherto an admirer, and whose attentions had been accepted, found himself dismissed with the polite unpoliteness too often exercised in analogous cases in a scale above. The neighbouring footman glared, and breathed harder, as these successive slights were put on his head with an almost sweet unconsciousness. He felt his own awkwardness, uncouth bearing, difficulty of disposing of his hands, &c. Nay, he almost fancied he heard his preferred rival allude to him as "Bumpkin." Alas! Mr. Baker could *valse*! Miss Stanley was the only one of the young ladies trained in the accomplishment; and when the persons of quality present were at last flying round, Mr. Baker and partner joined in the dance, and were quite as "heasy and floatin'" (words used by Mr. Baker's friend) as any of the others. The neighbouring footman—very raw in the face, and feeling his hands a dreadful incumbrance—had to look on. He had beside

to hear the pleasant "rallyings" from Miss Stanley's female friends.

Mr. Gay was watching the scene with intense enjoyment.

"Look at my popsy, how she spins it with the future member! I am sorry Chimeleigh can't come down. It would do him good to join in this. I think he coddles himself too much." He was talking to the hunting man. "Well, I won't give up D'Orsay yet. I chose him out of a hundred. He's the stuff in him all the while. The groom tells me he's been off his corn lately; but if we had him in good fettle—I tell you what; I'll ride him over to the drag-hunt on Friday, and restore his character for you. I'd back him against the whole of them. You know my little woman there can't be expected to have a wrist of iron, and the fox knows it well; with me it's another matter.—I say, Bligh, my man, what's *up* against the grain to-night? Why don't you stir those legal stumps of yours? Shake 'em out, man. Put Blackstone and the sheepskins out of your head for a while. Go and ask my girl to dance. Why, you ought to win everything you pleased to-night; as my poor little woman mightn't be footing it there but for you."

"Don't say that, please," said Bligh fretfully; "everybody gives it that turn. It's no such obligation at all, and I don't want it to be considered so. So pray forget it, and make Miss Diana forget it too."

Mr. Gay said afterwards, "Curious fellow, that Bob Bligh. I don't know what he is at." Then he thought of the old school-quarrel, and burst into a hearty laugh. "That's going on still," he said. "She—my popsy's—putting them by the ear still. Lord Bellman, I'll tell you as good a thing as you ever heard. There's no love lost, I suspect, between these two lads, I can tell you. And then he enlarged on that old story with which the reader is now pretty familiar.

"He is a little too magisterial for me," said his lordship, repeating a criticism that seemed destined to be always pronounced on poor Bligh. "Too wise; too much of a

monopoly of that sort of thing. I like the other man ; he is so open and dashing. H'd make a good M.P., I can tell you, and I dare say rattle off a good speech. Do you know, I begin to be afraid Mr. Bligh would stand too much on—er—principle. I mean, what he considers to be principle."

"Oh, he's a fine honest fellow, and all that," said Mr. Gay ; "but I suspect he hasn't shown us his politics yet. There's no knowing about *that*. Oh, he'll do, never fear. Our friend will come on his legs whenever he likes. A canny boy !"

Thus the crowd, if it is obliged to put up with constantly hearing some Aristides called Just, takes care to indemnify itself by pleasant and secret carping at the mortal whom they are thus compelled to accept.

Meanwhile the festival was going forward. It was past one o'clock ; but these were good rustic dancers, who danced but seldom and meant business. They were only beginning, as it were, and showed marks of violence. The young girls panted through their exercise without restraint or disguise, and showed flushed crimson cheeks. Our genteeler ladies might have been well shocked at such an exhibition. But the progress the gentlemen from town made—and notably Mr. Baker—was all but appalling, to certain hearts at least. The native coachman, and more native footman, were by this time shouldered away out of the field, and were glowering afar off. The latter had found his hands utterly odious and a burden. He saw it was fast drawing on to the "yard behind the stable" and a meeting with Mr. Baker,—the coachman to see fair. The first gentleman was indeed utterly rampant. He had the control of the whole, suppressing the country-dances as "vulgar," tolerating only "wallsirs" and "curdrills," in which he and his conquest, with the higher circles, alone took part. What could the men do? The ladies were all charmed with the new gentlemen. Now comes Robert Bligh to Diana, enjoying herself immensely and quite excited :

"Now," he said, "I suppose this is to be our dance, at last?"

The young lady put on an air of comic doubt and surprise.

Really now, are you sure? or was it not the next after this? Don't you think it is too crowded? and I am so tired."

So do young girls love to plague gentlemen of an easy temper; with your dashing gallants they dare not play such tricks.

Bligh quite understood, and smiled.

"I am not going to let you off," he said; "I have waited for my turn long enough."

Up comes Lugard express:

"Our dance," he says, "Miss Diana. I have got these rustics to play a good valse. Heaven knows what they will make of it."

A smile of mischief came into Diana's face, almost breaking through an expression of concern.

"Dear, dear me!" she said, "there must be a mistake here. Mr. Bligh tells me I am engaged to him."

"Surely," said Bligh warmly, "you can't *really* affect to say that there was a mistake? I came to remind you a dozen times. Nothing could be clearer."

"Nothing could be clearer," said Lugard coolly. "There was the valse first, the quadrille, and the valse again. It was all settled distinctly. But, my good Bligh, you're not before the Chancellor or Master of the Rolls asking for an injunction. Don't glare so at me, my dear friend."

Miss Diana tittered—she could not help it. Bligh *was* glaring. She would laugh anywhere—in church, if a surplice was awry. Bligh was a little wounded. It seemed that since he had done her that service, she had all but turned against him.

She did not answer Bligh, but with an attempt at a light manner, said—

"Oh, nonsense! they're going to begin."

"No; you must give me my turn. No? well, I'll never ask you again."

Lugard looked at her and pursed up his mouth, as being overwhelmed.

"What will become of you!" he said. "How will you get over that? This is getting serious. Hallo, there goes the music! Come along, Miss Di, and drown care."

The spirit of mischief was in Diana. She gave a helpless look at Bligh, turned irresolute to Lugard, who swept her off in a moment.

Bligh turned away.

"Well, that settles all," he said, "and I am glad of it. I have no business in this *galère*—as, indeed, I might have known."

When the dance was over, Lugard came up to him triumphant, and took him by the shoulders behind.

"Won't do," he said, "Master Robert. Red against black any day. All your Coke-Littletons aren't worth anything at a ball, except to put in a stove. I wish you saw your wicked look at that poor little girl."

"I am getting quite tired of this, Lugard," said Bligh, trying to be very calm. "And I don't think you behaved quite kindly or straightforwardly."

"Pray, how then?" said Lugard gravely; "explain yourself. You are surely not going to make a business about a valse, because a young girl chose to throw you over in a dance? that seems rather childish."

"You understand me perfectly. I don't mean that. But I think, considering how long we have known each other—However, it's no matter."

"My dear friend, I was at school with you—but so I was with a hundred more fellows. Come, now, no romance of this sort."

"With all my heart," said Bligh, "and certainly, considering our last day there, there is no reason for romance."

Lugard's brow darkened at this allusion.

"You had the best of it there by an accident. I was off my guard, and you stole a march on me. School and college victories are no test, all the world knows that. Hug yourself in the thought and welcome, my good Bligh. I am for victories in real life. I want to win in love and *elections*. Ha! ha! You understand. And I



think I am doing very well so far. Eh! come, do your best, you won't score against me, I warn you."

Bligh was now thoroughly roused. "Because I have not tried as yet. Suppose I begin now?"

And he walked away. The other, a little taken back at the change in his manner, looked distrustfully after him.

But now it was growing late. Lord Bellman was in bed long ago. The "quality" were dropping away gradually. Mr. Baker alone was unfatigued. He was sitting in a corner, nursing his knee, with the lady he had so fascinated. A little more and the native footman's large hands would be at his throat. Every one was talking of the conquest.

When all were going to bed, Bligh stole quietly away. He thought of his mother with uneasiness. She was still up and watchful. He said his good-night a little hastily. "She will not be pleased with the night's work," he thought. "What could I do?"

She whispered him, "Good child,—good son,—nothing could be better!"

He looked up wondering. "Worse, mother," he said; "it's all a delusion; and we'd better dismiss it, and waste no more time."

"You foolish boy, you know nothing. I have been looking; you have made progress to-night. I know girls and their ways, and I am more than satisfied. I will tell you something else to do to-morrow. Dream a little of your politics to-night."

And Bligh went away pleased, but wondering still more.

It did seem that Mrs. Bligh was in some way right, for Miss Diana came fluttering down. "Where is he? Where is Mr. Robert? Gone away, and I going to dance this last dance with him! Oh, Mrs. Bligh, I am afraid he is angry with me!"

"Angry with you?" said Lugard, "what folly! Come along, finish with me."

"No, indeed!" said she pettishly. "This was all your doing, and I'll punish you; but I'm too tired; I'll talk to Mrs. Bligh instead."



## CHAPTER XV.

### A NEW CHANCE.

**T**HE breakfast table the next morning was all in a clatter with talking over the arrangements for the drag-hunt. Here was a new excitement—who would ride, what was the course, who were to be the riders? It had been got up by Pratt, and by that “true British sportsman” Mr. Featherston, the M.F.H. It was new to that part of the country, but some had seen it practised very successfully in Ireland, over the Kildare country, or with “The Blazers.” All tongues were once more loosed, and his lordship, greatly pleased with his previous day’s exertions, looked forward to it with great pleasure.

Then the mail came, and his lordship again became absorbed in despatches—now contracting his brow, now smiling complacently, now elevating his eyebrows, as who should say, “Now, what *are* you at?”

“Ah!” he said, “Pollock, my man of business, will be down here to-day about the Freeman estate. Curious how news travels; he says, ‘I suppose you have heard that there will shortly be a vacancy by death or resignation in this borough. This will add something to the value of the property, as the Freeman interest used to be all-powerful. It is to be the Bellman interest now.’ This all concerns Mr. Richard Lugard. Give me one of your

good cigars after breakfast, and come and have a talk with me on the lawn."

When the dance of the night before had been talked over, and Mr. Baker's conquest and the native footman's grief and rage described,—how there had nearly been a personal altercation between the two gentlemen after midnight; and when Lady Margaret had told how her maid in a flush of triumph, had disclaimed the idea of any relations with "such trumpery" as the native footman, the party broke up. Lord Bellman went out with Lugard "for the cigar;" and Diana, bright as was the morning, came up all smiles to Mr. Bligh.

"I am sure," she said, "you thought I behaved infamously last night. I know you did."

Bligh, whose eyes were following his lordship and Lugard a little abstractedly as they walked on the lawn, turned to her absently:

"How?" he said, with genuine surprise. "Oh, I remember! Dear, no!"

"But you should have tried again. I was looking for you at the end of the night; but you'd gone away in a huff, I am sure."

"I assure you, no," said he laughing, and with an earnestness that showed truth. "I went to the smoking-room, and had a cigar with one of the officers. They were telling some rather funny stories, and I am ashamed to say how late we stayed."

Now, considering the amount of capital this little heroine had expended last night and on the present morning, in a sort of remorse, and resolution to make *amende* and soothe the wounded soul of the man she had treated so cruelly, this reception came on her a little unwelcome. She said nothing, and in a moment was called away.

Lunch came round, following at a very close interval on the heels of breakfast. Instead of "Come and stay a few days with me," your country-house host should surely write, "Come and *feast* a few days with me." Lunch is a poor mongrel meal, which is not the cheerful herald of a

day's work, like the brighter breakfast, nor the pleasant finish, as was the state-dinner that day. It was of extra splendour. There was a place vacant for some time ; no one remarked it, for there were many dining—the officers, and Captain Gilpin, the diverting pantomimist, who had secretly brought a small bag, which contained his stage-dress and properties. His brethren told every one that Gilpin would kill them with laughing.

Mr. Pratt had been asked ; and the Garibaldian, having long since taken the measure of the young lord, and seen that any matrimonial minings or borings were simply idle, had turned her attention to the young officer Lugard, whose spirits and off-hand manner she liked.

With the young ladies who belong to the corps we have called Garibaldians there is one rule : never to be idle—but to engage the best that is available. Thus the warfare goes on ; and as Chimeleigh was out of the question, Lugard came next, and would do till something better offered. This excellent economy of labour and time would have its fruits. Besides, as she told Diana, she began to feel a sort of *sentiment* towards this gallant and ready young man ; and Diana was delighted to portion off Mr. Dick with her friend. She laughed as she did so, and affected to think he would be pleased. He looked “black” at this ill-usage ; but it did not make much difference, for he contrived to sit very near her. He was in great spirits, and great good-humour with himself. In truth, he had noticed Bligh's absence.

“We shall have some fun to-night,” he said. “I made Gilpin put up his tom-fool's dress to do the blind man. I don't understand how any man can stand up in the middle of a room and buffoon ; but that's *his* concern. It makes me laugh, and is very good of its kind.”

“Goodness me,” said Diana with a start, “how odd ! Where's Robert Bligh ? I wonder has anything happened ?”

“Why, do you mean to say,” said Dick, with scorn, “that he was expected, and that he has not sent ?”

“Oh, I am sure,” Diana said with a face of concern, “something important has happened. I know him so well.”

"Yes," said Dick, "some wretched two-guinea brief has tumbled in. At the Bar, you know, they get so greedy. They sacrifice everything, and would kiss the very coat-tail of an attorney. Our friend, you must know, has a very wary eye to the pounds. I remember his saving ways at school. We used to call him Doctor Syntax, you know."

"Oh, here he is!" said Miss Diana, half rising in her excitement. "I knew he would come."

Miss Diana, indeed, had always an absent idol—a curious little perverseness, which sent her young mind off from what was present to what was away, or was to come.

Dick looked black again. Bligh stole softly into his place; it was exactly opposite Diana.

"I am so sorry," he said, "but I was kept. Some people from Calthorpe came in, and I could not get rid of them. I tried all I could."

"Every one has been talking of you, my friend," said Dick. "When there is a dinner-party in the case, all other things give place, you know—even briefs. But what do you say to Miss Diana only having missed you a minute ago?"

"I am so glad of that," said Bligh, calmly; "so I am just in time, you see."

"What do you do with all your fees," said Diana, "and making such a quantity of money?"

"This was not law-business," said he.

"So much the worse," said Lugard, with a loud laugh. "It was settled before you came in, that that was your only excuse."

"And what was it, then?" said Diana.

"Some business," said Bligh, "which—"

"Oh, a mystery!" said Lugard. "Our friend is so close and guarded—he won't commit himself. We must beg his pardon for asking."

"I meant no harm," said Diana with a sort of serious penitence.

"I make no mystery," said Bligh, laughing, "and

there is no harm in it. It was simply a deputation from Calthorpe."

"A deputation!" repeated Lugard, laying down his knife and fork. "What on earth about?"

Mr. Lugard senior, not very far away, had caught the words, and looked out eagerly.

"So curious a thing," went on Bligh; "and I am sure you will laugh. But I have almost made up my mind. Richard, you won't like it, I'm afraid."

"You are getting a way of talking like a sphinx."

"Well, I found our little place quite filled up; two gigs at the door, and the drawing-room full of large men. Prosser, the saddler—"

"Why you don't mean to say that they came to you about the election?"

"Exactly," said Bligh. "Wasn't it curious, after our talk this morning? They had heard about the present man's sickness; and Prosser, who is the leading politician—"

"A flaming Radical," said Lugard, growing excited; "nice sort to come to a gentleman. I'd have kicked the dirty fellows out of my room."

"Yes, he is a Radical; but we talked things over, and I found his opinions were nearer mine than I supposed. We have all a sort of philosophic Radicalism, which can stretch, and do very well."

"And you—what did you do?"

"Well, I hesitated a long time; but they were so pressing, and showed me so much the almost certainty of the thing—"

"That you gave in! 'Pon my word these are nice surprises! We never know what will happen before going to bed. He's very clever, isn't he? always planning something in this secret way."

"There was nothing secret about it," said Bligh, laughing. "It was as much a surprise to me as to any one."

Miss Diana was listening with great interest. For the power of getting on in the world she had the deepest respect and awe. Here was a fresh move in the game.

"How delightful!" she cried; "wouldn't it be amus-

ing, a regular election ; or," she added, laughing, "a contest *between you two*? How funny it would be!"

"And let the best man win," said Bligh, with interest. "It *would* be exciting. The Army against the Bar."

Diana had turned grave.

"No, I hope not. There must be nothing of the kind. What would *we* do? no, no." She saw Dick's eyes glaring about, and fixed at times on Bligh with a very wild and fierce expression.

He hardly spoke for the rest of dinner, or affected to talk very earnestly to his companion the Garibaldian, who was quite pleased with the impression she had made. Though the regular army was not in sight, this skirmishing kept her hand in.

At last the ladies retired, and Mr. Gay called to those far off to close up. He had hardly settled himself comfortably, and thrown an eye down the table, when Lugard, who had moved up close, said very loudly,

"Here's a piece of news brought in during dinner. It seems Mr. Bligh has been spending his day canvassing."

All started.

"Hallo, Master Bob!" cried Mr. Gay, "what's this?"

"Lugard means," said Bligh, quietly, "that a number of the electors came to ask me to stand—"

"Quite unsolicited, of course," said Lugard, with a toss of his head.

"Quite. They were there some hours. They went over all the chances, and certainly made out a very enticing case."

"But, my good friend," said Mr. Gay gravely, "what are you talking of? Who are they—publicans or pot-wallopers?"

"No ; Prosser, you know—"

"What, Prosser!" said Lord Bellman, starting. "Why, he's for me ; at least, they told me so. I declare, I don't understand—"

His lordship was put out, Mr. Gay looked vexed, and Richard triumphant. Bligh put himself together as though he was going to address a throng.

"I must explain," he said. "Lord Bellman will understand that as yet I have been quite passive in the matter. Though," he added, smiling, "after what passed this morning, I think I am perfectly free."

"Oh, quite so, quite so," said his lordship.

"I think that's all fair," added Mr. Gay, relieved.

"Well," went on Robert, "they told me candidly, that as far as Lord Chimeleigh went they were quite content, and that Lord Bellman being lord of the soil, and all that, they would not like to go against him; but with any deputy, as Mr. Prosser remarked, it would be a different matter."

"How handsome!" broke out Lugard, loudly; "how condescending! Lord Bellman ought to be grateful. Do you know what this fellow Prosser is, whom Mr. Bligh has taken up? A low blackguard of a Radical, a pothouse politician, that I wouldn't leave in the room with a half-crown on the chimneypiece. That's what he is. I must congratulate Mr. Robert Bligh on the new friends and allies he has picked up."

There was something so vehement in this speech that every one looked with some wonder at the speaker. Mr. Lugard *pere* said quietly across the table, "What are you talking of—about allies and friends? Take the thing quietly, my dear boy. Keep that for the men. Prosser is a shrewd, long-headed fellow, and our knowing friend Bligh was quite right to make up to him."

"I never had a communication with him before to-day," replied Bligh, quietly.

"Ah, but mamma had," said Mr. Lugard, showing *all* his white teeth; "your clever mother, she knows how to do this."

"I know nothing of it, and my conviction is—" but he stopped; for it flashed on him that what Mr. Lugard had said explained it.

"Yes, I am quite right," said the other triumphantly. "But it was very well done."

"Very well done!" said his son in the excited tone—"to take up principles of that sort! I should be ashamed



to do it, and wouldn't for all the seats in the world. He says he is a philosophic Radical. I don't understand these refinements."

"Oh, it will soon be generally understood. I mean an educated Radical—educated morally and intellectually. All that is wanting is self-restraint. If the lower classes were well off and comfortable, and educated out of their violence and unreasonableness—which *is* what is *radical*—there would be nothing to be afraid of."

"I suppose you'd sit down with them to this table?"

"Certainly," said Bligh, "under those conditions."

"And this is the stuff you and Mr. Prosser were talking together?—'pon my word!"

"I am afraid the army is a poor school," said Mr. Lugard senior. "I must tell you, Richard, you are saying very foolish things. But if I may ask Mr. Bligh, what is he going to do?"

"Well," said Bligh, with a sort of confidence, "we have not quite decided; but, really, I am thinking of trying it. I know I shall fail; but as my friend and adviser the queen's counsel says—the next best thing to being elected is having been a candidate. It is everything to a barrister. As Lord Bellman was kind enough to speak to me about it, and gave me a sort of offer, I expressly said to them, if Lord Chimeleigh was in the case, I should not move in the matter."

"Well, I must say that is all fair and aboveboard, Mr. Bligh. We must talk this over together, and make out something.—What about the Drag hunt, Gay—what is the hour? How is D'Orsay?" And as it was plain his lordship wished to change the subject, the whole company, except Richard, were presently riding away over the course—now on the back of D'Orsay, now on the other noble animal—inspecting this jump and that; and Mr. Pratt, who had been silent as the grave during the dinner, suddenly had his jaws relaxed, and became fluent.

In the drawing-room, when the "gentlemen joined the ladies," there was a pleasant excitement. In that bright realm, in the soft light, Diana was fluttering with an air

of mystery—a bright creature, indeed, herself. Something was coming. Captain Gilpin was missing. She was looking to the door. Presently it was opened by Mr. Chewton, who on occasion would graciously lend himself to undignified offices, and who announced, in his best professional way, “Mr Slapbang!” To the amazement of the beholders, the wonder, surprise, and delight of the assembled thousands, as the *Mercury* would have said, a sort of mendicant or beggar-man entered, all rags, all patches, with an old hat without a crown, and a couple of long straps covered with knives. This stranger entered quite coolly, and standing in the middle of the room, began leisurely a sort of chant, “Buy my knives! Who’ll buy, who’ll buy! Knives to grind!—razors to grind!”—in short, convulsing every spectator. The Garibaldian said later, “she was shrieking with laughter,” especially when the inimitable humourist went round to the ladies, and asked *them* for a razor to grind. Diana, to whom he made this proposal first, looked a little grave. This was the whole performance; yet he kept it up, on such material, for more than half an hour, until Mr. Gay, with his arm round Diana, said in a half-whisper,

“I think, doatsey, we’ve had enough of the knife-grinder—”

What a thing is *esprit de corps*—a synonym, surely, for charity and love! The delight and admiration and pride of his brother officers was something to see. They looked not at him, but at the other faces, to see how they were affected. They grinned—“Buckstone,” or “the Funny Blake” of the music-halls, whom they placed higher than Buckstone, was nothing to this—all, except Lugard, who kept apart, and glowered and “pished” at it, and said it made him sick. But he was out of humour;—and waiting for an opportunity, when he had retired, and everybody was saying how funny it was, and how “clever” it was, Lugard came up to Bligh, and said, “Come down and have a turn at the billiards.”

Bligh said with surprise, “Billiards! My dear Richard, not now, surely. We should have gone after dinner.”

L

"Well, you needn't play. Come down ; I want to speak to you."

They went down, Bligh wondering. They went outside on the terrace, and then Lugard suddenly turned, and placed himself in front of him. Bligh saw that he was excited—his eyes "savage," his cheeks flushed.

"Now, then," he said, "what does all this mean?—what are you coming to? I must know, and know it here too, before you leave this place!"

"Oh, this is mere absurdity," said the other impatiently. "I am getting tired of it! Let us go back, and talk of this in the morning."

"Yes," said the other scornfully, "when you will have time to get up your lawyer-like schemes, and plot something else. I am tired of it, and sick of it. You have laid yourself out to scheme against me, with all those little tricks in which you are so skilful."

"I have no tricks, Lugard," said the other, quietly; "you never made a greater mistake. The way you go on to me—and have always gone on—really seems the result of some morbid delusion. Only for that—"

"Yes, only for *that*! Go on; finish, please."

"No, not this time," said the other impatiently. "I won't give you that opening. I am afraid you want to pick a quarrel with me. And if you only think a moment, *that* won't benefit you in the least; for you must see that, if I took a real enmity to you, my tricks, as you call them, would be doubly dangerous."

"Then I'll match you, tricks and all, as sure as my name is Richard Lugard. And I tell you, you don't leave this to-night, until I hear from you what you mean—what you are doing here in this house, and what wretched scheme have you."

"About what?"

"About me—about *her*? Now, don't attempt it; it won't do. You'll find I'm a man not to be played with. I've a demon in me that will come out one of these days, and won't stick at a trifle."

"There is no need for all this," said Bligh. "Now you

are reasonable, or more reasonable ; and I see what you want. As for threatening me, you know that is absurd. But you wish to know my *scheme*. Is it about the election ? Very well ; I must go on with that. I wish to rise in the world, and can't afford to lose such a chance ; there. What else ?”

“ You cold, crafty fellow ! That's it, is it ? Then you won't, if I can hinder you—if I was to beggar myself and my father both !”

“ Fair again—quite fair. There's an honest and straightforward principle—”

“ Don't give me your sneering speeches, I don't want them. And what do you mean about *her*—Diana ?”

“ Ah ! *that's* another affair. You can't expect me to be so candid in that. But I may tell you this : I do admire her, and always have done so ; though I should never dream that she would think a poor plodding lawyer worthy of her.”

“ He will turn me mad !” said Lugard, stamping with rage. “ Never mind ; if I were to live for nothing else, I will live to defeat you here. What insufferable airs ! You have laid yourself out for all this ! But I shall lay myself out too. Mind, I give you warning ; expect nothing from me. I shall stop at nothing with such a—”

“ With all my heart,” said Bligh ; “ then that's understood, and I am glad of it. You might have made me a warm friend, and I would not *then* have wished to stand in your way. But you have always,” added Bligh, a little excitedly, “ behaved to me so unkindly and ungraciously—as if you had a sort of hatred to me—that I am glad it has come to this. I shall make no more efforts at conciliating you, but just go on in my own course, as if you were not in the world.”

“ Then don't carry that too far,” said Lugard, in a low suppressed voice ; “ I warn you. I can't trust myself—”

“ Why, where on earth—” said a sweet voice, “ are you talking of the law and the prophets ? Come back to the drawing-room, I beg. It is not decent to our little hostess. And young men are scarce.”

This was Mr. Lugard *père*.

"You go, Bligh, at once, like a good fellow, and don't lose time."

Bligh went away hastily. Mr. Lugard waited till he was gone ; then the sweet voice changed.

"You fool!" he said; "you great, ill-conditioned, helpless fool! Is this the way you mean to get on in the world? Have you no sense or brains, you vulgar-minded fellow?"

"It is no use talking to me that way," said Dick, "I've to bear enough without that."

"Then bear it, and get on by yourself. I see nothing is to be made of you. You have no delicacy, no tact. Why, that man's little finger has more wit in it than your whole twelve stone."

"Because he schemes and plots."

"And why don't *you*? But you can't. A clodhopper or a bumpkin would do more. Picking a vulgar quarrel here! Good God! But it's useless teaching you. I tell you what now, Mr. Richard, you must look after yourself. I've spent too much money on you, teaching you as it is ; and now I'm not going to pinch myself, in my middle-age, to support you. You are as helpless now as you were at school, when that fellow disgraced you publicly."

"I haven't forgotten *that* day yet, long ago as it is. I'll beat him yet, and get interest from him too."

"Well, do so ; it's your own affair. But, in God's name, don't take that vulgar way of violence and losing your temper. You can't imagine the childish figure it makes you cut. If you'll let me give you one bit of advice—and if you are sensible, you'll take it—your hands are too coarse for this delicate work ; you haven't the neatness of touch for an affair of this kind. That other girl—that ironmaster's daughter—I think would do for you better. And you *might* have a chance there. She is coarse enough, God knows! It's all plain sailing ; and I could help you there with the old father. But how do you mean to beat him, pray?"

"Why, at this election. If I have to sell my commission, I'll oppose him."

"And come on me afterwards. By God, you shan't,

sir! Do as you like, though; but mind, I warn you. If I could advise you, I would work that lord still. But no matter. And as for the girl—”

“I’ll beat him there too.”

“And a fine way you’re going about it! Get back to the drawing-room, and lose no time. I dare say the fellow has scored a point or two in your absence. God help us! a man like you—in a cavalry regiment—and to be spoon-feeding you in this way!”

Both gentlemen came back to the drawing-room; Mr. Lugard *père* looking as sweet and placid as if he had just gone to his room—as he said he had—for a handkerchief. Richard, as he entered, saw that Bligh was indeed scoring a few more points. The little lady of the house saw his restless eyes, and her almost mischievous heart was pleased. She was very young, and this sort of game, new to her, seemed the most exciting and amusing thing in the world. These were such happy days for her, she thought; and to this night she used to look back as one of the happiest. Her father came up to her. “Do you know where I have been, popsicums?—taking a sly look at D’Orsay. He is in grand fettle. How will you lay out your money? I am going to put another fifty to it. How will you lay it out? All I ask is a little out of it; a picture for old papsy—coloured, to hang in his room, when he gets past his work, and you are married. I see that’s not far off.”

“Years, you foolish man; a great many years.”

“Oh, I see, miss!” with one of his loud enjoying laughs. “Listen to this, Lord Bellman. She has some hearts to crack yet, before she goes into harness! A nice plan she is laying out! Never mind.”

“And the picture, dear,” she whispered; “why didn’t you tell me to-day? To-morrow I will drive into Irnston, and I’ll sit to the man there.”

“Ah, witch, witch!” said he, looking at her with inexpressible fondness. “How she thinks of her old man!” Many afterwards remembered this picture of the fond father and his daughter.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE DRAG-HUNT.

**T**HE all-important morning, which had been looked for with such excitement, proved to be dull, dark, and drizzling. The rain was streaming down. Every one appeared in low spirits. But sporting is rigidly independent of wet. It must go on "through *cælum rots*," as one of the hunting gentlemen said, by way of classical jest. Yet it was surprising with what a spirit the party set out. The Squire's own Tom Moody reported that the ground held together well; and as the hunt was to be down country, starting from Shepherd's Bush, and to finish close to Irnston, at Furley Hatch, a stretch of some ten miles over about as stiff a line as could be desired, there was every prospect of a very great trial being given to the horses. In the Hall, Squire Gay was drawing on his gloves, with the ladies about him, and his Diana looking up fondly into his face.

"Do I look like the picture, eh, pet? the old 'Flames and Blazes' upstairs. Don't tell me that, or I'll go out low-spirited. Ha! ha! ha!" and he gave one of his loud, boisterous laughs.

"I begin to hate the sight of it," she said with a pretty impatience.

"I wish you were coming, cricket, to see your nag cut out his work. But don't fear; I'll carry him through, and take down Mr. Prati's conceit a bit. What will you do with yourself, dear?"

"Oh, I have a little plan," she said with confidence. "If it clears at all, I and Lady Margaret will take the carriage and drive over to Irnston, and settle about the picture."

"Good cricket! always thoughtful. So you're giving it to me all the same, whether D'Orsay gets his money or not? I tell you what,—he'll take *him* in also, and he shall be done in all his glory, with a medal about his neck. Give me a kiss, poppet. I wish you were coming."

His Tom Moody now reported that it would clear "afore eleven, sartain," an accuracy which always gave an authority to Tom's predictions, though they failed and came true with tolerable impartiality. Then they all rode away.

How many times was it said that Squire Gay had the true stuff in him—a man of the right sort; which meant that he spent a great deal of money on horses, dogs, foxes, keepers, pheasants, scarlet cloth, and pigskin. The "right sort" becomes such a different thing to different minds; and there were plenty to whom the Squire was a man of low, coarse tastes, who was bringing up that young girl of his *nicely*. Others said strongly that he was neglecting the interests of his spiritual welfare.

Out of Gay Court gates, between the two larks, debouched another lively procession. The drag-hunt was to be six miles off, and the roads were already covered with stragglers going to work, but just turning ever so little out of their way to see the sport—that "ever so little" amounting to actually turning their backs on their own proper direction. Tom Moody had indeed proved right on this occasion, and before eleven o'clock the rain had stopped, and the sun was seen hovering behind a cloud, undecided, as one of the "sporting gents" remarked, whether he should "peel off his greatcoat and show himself." The "meet" was some miles off, and D'Orsay had been sent on before at an easy trot, and was already wating, in a farmer's snug stable, to be taken out and mounted.

When they reached Shepherd's Bush the whole countryside had gathered. A drag-hunt was a novelty there;



many hardly knew what it meant, and scarcely dreamed that it was a sporting hybrid—in their own phrase, “a cross” between a race and a hunt. By this time the rain had quite cleared off, the sun had got rid of his indecision, and there was a crowd of what, in the special language of the occasion, might be termed “sporting swells”—Mr. Thomas Clough, M.F.H., Major Rushout, G. H. Washwood, “that true veteran” of the field, Lord Bellman, and many more, whose names could be ascertained by searching an old file of the *Mercury*. Fine times indeed for the *Mercury* and its reporters. Need we say that that excellent journal was all but dissolved in raptures over the spirit, the virtues, the liberality of that true English supporter of manly sport, Squire Gay? And without going the length of this dramatic exuberance, it was felt that morning, that when Squire Gay “went”—which was many, many years off in the ordinary course of nature—the fast friend to true sport, the kindest and most generous country gentleman in the world, would be gone. There he was now, on D’Orsay’s back, bright, healthful, genial, and hearty, full of spirits and enjoyment, knowing everybody, glad to see everybody, with a good-natured word for everybody—a true sportsman, and, what was better, a true man. “He was the common link,” said the *Mercury* in its own way, “the kindly centre, where the most opposite natures could meet. He had not a single enemy; the poor, the widow, and the orphan knew him as their certain stay and benefactor.” How hearty his greeting to Mr Pratt, already on his “Flemish dray,” in his black hunting-coat, his boots without tops, well shaved, with small “square-inch” whisker and a yellow neckerchief, his limbs fitting to his animal as though nice smooth “beds” had been scooped out purposely!—“Here we are, Pratt! Look on this picture and on that, my friend. Your money is lost already! I wish my little lady was down here to see. You know you are booked to me to dinner, winning or losing. I am only sorry I didn’t double the stakes.”

“Quite in time,” said Mr. Pratt, getting out his book nimbly. “Is it done?”

"Done!" said Mr. Gay, impatiently. "Done, and done again, and three times over, if you like. Have you eyes, man? Did you ever read of the hare and tortoise? Done?—to be sure! What a purse my little girl will have, to be sure! Now, Lord Bellman; it's time, I think.—Now, gentlemen, please."

A friendly M.F.H. was to act as starter. Already the trail had been laid on. The dogs were eager; they sniffed the red-herring which had gone over the ground at the end of a string. Towler and Sweetlips, the "Nestors" of the park, were not a little intrigued at the new flavour, so different from the usual "reynard" bouquet. Tom Moody, it must be said, lent himself to the arrangements with a certain willingness, though not with enthusiasm. He said it was "new-fangled" and "Hirish." He never had relished the Hirish 'orses, and their special tricks of going at their jumps.

Now all was ready, and the friendly M.F.H. is at his post. Many, looking at the two horses, could smile at the notion of Pratt's horse "holding on;" but still, Pratt himself was such a steady "knowing card," that it seemed that *he* would hold on. His gifts were so remarkable, that, as a friendly admirer said, "he'd win on a broom."

Now there rises the cry, "They're off!" and not only the horses and riders, but every living thing besides; those on foot "cutting round," taking short paths, clearing hedges and ditches, to come up in time and see the fun. They could not hope to be in at the finish, as the course was straight across country; but there was the great jump—the feature of the course—close to Giles's windmill, and about which "half the town" had secured good places. The mill-race here seemed to fall in with the sporting tastes of the community, and flowed away just in front of a good hard iron highroad, which made carriage-wheels ring out musically as they rolled over it. At this side of the road there was a hedge, but at the other there was none; and to make everything more "stiff," a good hurdle had been put across the hedge. The other jumps were of the common hunting pattern.

Very soon all the world saw that Mr. Gay's good judgment in matters of the horse-world was right on this occasion. He himself, looking back with a smile, saw that the "big" drag-horse was labouring through a field or two, grown boggy under the rain.

Never was there such good, steady, straight, hard riding. The whole field held on together; no man went through a gate ignobly. The dogs led in full cry after their imaginary fox, or the mysterious animal which they fancied they were pursuing. It was growing exciting; and now about two miles ahead could be seen Giles's mill, and Mr. Gay, looking back, saw with a smile "Pratt's horse" labouring on, as it seemed to him, at a jogging pace. "Ha! Master Pratt, this will take the conceit out of you a bit. Now, D'Orsay, my boy, think of your little mistress, and get ready for stiff Dick here."

Suddenly he heard a thundering behind, and, looking round, saw that the great horse had now indeed ceased to "labour," and was pounding along over everything—stones, gravel, clay; and now came a smart crash as his heel touched the rail and smashed it "as if it was a cane." Pratt has his hunting-whip in the air, and was bending over him as if he meant to put him to it. At once a pair of spurs were in D'Orsay's flanks, and now indeed the race began. "I thought he was pumped out," said Mr. Gay to himself, pressing his hat down; "but, lad, now for it!"

On they came. The countrymen were seen running to get close to the mill to see the big jump. There was a large company gathered already, crushing and crowding, through a morbid hope, of course not expressed or even acknowledged, that there would be a "smash" or two. They saw the little patches of scarlet flashing in the distance, not with the brilliancy with which race-colours flash out. Here they were, and they made out very well that the big horse and "Muster Pratt" had "collared" Squire Gay, and that brave and true-hearted sportsman, bare-headed—for his hat had burst its string, and was about a mile and a half behind—was striving hard to keep up the dandy D'Orsay.

Ah, Dandy indeed! inclined to pout and fret like other dandies when treated crossly. His elegant skin, that seemed as if treated with cosmetics, was now all disordered, dusty, and dirty; his eyes were fiery. It seemed to his rider that he was growing sulky. Here was Pratt and the big horse not three yards behind.

The expectant rustics, their "chaw-bacon" faces warmed into something like intelligence, or at least eagerness, straining over each others' heads, heard the thundering of hoofs; and Holden, the farmer "beyant t' mill," but who had a secret instinct for horses, and who always contrived to have the most serviceable and valuable little nag in the district on which to ride round and see his fields and his men at work, often told the story to his family, "at foireside loike."

"Ye see," he said, "I was on Robin there, and I kep the pace oop for a mile before they came on; and then I saw that Squire ha' found that the stuff were gone out of his horse. I could see, as plain as I see ye now, that he was workin' his mouth as t' jockey-lads do at t' finish; and I see t' other fellow, Pratt, on his beast, but no working there—his horse was a-working o' *him*; that makes all the differ. Poor Squire! he was as eager as a boy; and I see him cooming along, cooming along, oop and down, and his poor coverless head lookin' back and lookin'; and then they were at t' big joomp. And when he lifted t' horse—which he *had* to—at the rail, I saw that it wur sulky, and wouldn't put himself together, ye see; and then there was a smash, and something like rolling o' stones out of a cart; and down they came into the byroad, with poor Squire's coverless forehead full on the road, hard as yon iron. I could see how he was flung, as I was high in my stirrups on t' cob's back."

This was the story told by Farmer Holden, and by many more mouths, and at great length by the *Mercury*.

Poor Squire Gay, the best fellow in the world! Unlucky D'Orsay! Skilful Pratt: He was indeed right: D'Orsay had proved that he could not "put himself together" by the most fatal logic.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### FATAL NEWS.

**W**HEN the rain had stopped and the sun came out, our Diana became like a little cricket, as her father would say. She flew to order the carriage—she flew to find Lady Margaret.

“Will you oblige me,” she said, “dear Lady Margaret, and drive over with me to Irnston? I want a surprise for dear papa about my picture, which he has set his heart upon.”

But Lady Margaret was filled with obstreperous grief and consternation.

“My darling, what can I do? what am I to do? I made an appointment with that man Murdoch the curate,—fifteen children, I believe,—no shoes or stockings, and all that. And you know if I let him get at poor Bowman, who’s as soft as a babe—and then there’s the steward coming over expressly. My dear child, what *shall* I do?”

Diana laughed at this distress. “My dear Lady Margaret, I know what I shall do;” and tripped off.

She met Mrs. Bligh in the hall, and that lady said she would be delighted to go.

The carriage was ordered for after lunch.

During the course of this arrangement—and even such a little matter seemed to Diana a vast triumph of diplomacy,

involving "a strain on the mind," and its success quite putting her in spirits—she had seen, to her great surprise, from the window, Dick coming slowly round from the stable. Well, I declare!" she said, "what is over Richard Lugard not to go out and see papa race? How curious of him!"

"Most!" said Mrs. Bligh, coldly. "I wish Robert had the same notion, who is a man of books. But he could not be kept."

Later, Diana saw him again, "prowling about" restlessly, kicking the grass, his hands in his pockets.

She smiled to herself, went to her room, changed her earrings—she had "pets" in earrings, as she had dogs and horses—smoothed her hair before the glass, and put on her daintiest hat, of which she had as many as there are in a stage-wardrobe. Then she went down to speak to the gardener about the fruit for dinner.

Having performed that office—perhaps a little to the surprise of the gardener—she went her way towards the house, bright and cheerful with the little duty she had undertaken, and thinking to herself, "Poor Dick! I have been so cross to him and inattentive; I *must* make it up to him a little to-night. What a pity, though, *he's not clever!* But I must make it up to him." And then she thought how they would have such fun that night! and she would dance with him, just a little more than with Robert Bligh; thus carrying out that arbitrary raising or levelling the little scale she was holding in her fingers. And yet at that moment, while she laid out these plans of delight, with life seeming to spread itself out indistinctly in delightful *paysages*, delicious prairies abounding in soft streams and colours and sweet waters, so secure in their exquisiteness that it was not worth while to pause to estimate them in detail—at this very moment, alas, there was a great crowd of stooping figures and faces at Giles's Mill. There was the contrast—the butterfly-child full of hopes, and the father passing, if not already passed, beyond the region of earthly hopes!

"It so surprises me, Richard," she said, with her eyes

on the ground, as if she *was* surprised, "that you are not gone with them."

"I am sick of it," he said, impatiently. "Horses are not everything in the world, as one might fancy from the way men talk. We must live for something else, I hope. I saw them go off, and then came back here."

"To go and walk about the garden, and hit at the poor flowers with that stick."

"Then you saw me?" he said eagerly. "You were looking out at me, and take an interest in me?"

"I take an interest in my flowers, of course, and in Mr. Richard too, I hope."

"Oh, yes, you say that in the usual conventional way? just as you'd tell the curate and the doctor you were anxious about their wives and brats. Oh Diana, if you only knew—"

At this moment they heard a light step. He stopped, and Mr. Lugard senior, with his cigar and *Times*, suddenly emerged from a side walk. Dick coloured, and gave an impatient stamp.

"Just a moment, Dick," said his father sweetly.—"Talking over the race, eh, Miss Diana? Over by this time!—No, a letter, my dear boy," he said, putting his arm softly into his son's.

"I can't go now, father. A letter will keep without turning sour."

"See how they treat us poor fathers, Miss Diana.—See here, Richard, a moment;" and he opened a letter, and drawing it aside, seemed to be reading it, and with his eyes down demurely on the writing. Dick, though, heard him say, "For God's sake, are you going to make a fool of yourself? I saw you from my window. It's too soon—"

Dick flushed up. "I know what I am about."

"And see here, again, what he writes," went on Mr. Lugard, in the same sweet tone. "I tell you you're a fool, and don't know your ground."

Dick set himself up a little haughtily. Diana, bending over her flowers, was not a little mystified.

"Very well," said Mr. Lugard, "with all my heart. I won't interfere ; and I have all my *Times* to get through."

"What was that *great* secret," said Diana, "if I might ask?" "Oh, nothing," said he ; "something absurd. My father makes mysteries of everything, because he was once an *attaché*."

"There *was* a secret, but I'm not worth telling anything to."

"I would tell you anything, do anything for you," said he, impetuously ; "though I dare say you don't think so. I will prove it to you in any way you wish. I would do more for you, in my way, than those cold, wise creatures who profess such a deal, and are so good and virtuous."

There was a twinkle of mischief in her eyes.

"Yet these are the people we are told to like and imitate, are they not?"

"Not hypocrites, I suppose, or scheming fellows, whom I could expose—"

"Who on earth *can* you mean?" she said with the same air of pretended wonder. "Where are all these wicked people?"

"You don't see their plans ; but I do. If I chose, I could upset them in a second. Listen to me, Diana, one moment," he added, suddenly stopping before her. "You know how long we have known each other ; from before I was at that school. Ali that time, even when I was a child, your image used to be before me. I was always thinking of you, and looking forward to one day—like this—when—"

Diana had grown a little restless during this speech ; indeed, his eyes and flushed cheeks seemed to have spoken already what he was going on to say. She looked round uneasily.

"I am afraid," she said, "Mrs. Bligh will be looking for me."

"Just a moment, Diana. I *must* speak out now."

"No, no, no," said she, in alarm ; "don't Richard, please."

"I must go away soon to that regiment which I hate, and which I have a presentiment I shall not stay long in."



Why should I stay here, perhaps to be mortified more and more every day ? ”

“ Indeed, no,” said she earnestly. “ Oh, no, Richard, none of us here would do that—not for the world.”

“ Perhaps not ; I am sure not you. But you don’t know what I feel looking on, and what I suffer. Oh Diana, you know what my faults are—how warm, and ungovernable even, I am. Yet still I am sure I could become better, if you, Diana, would only think me worthy—let me finish. You should do what you like with me ; I would be your slave for the rest of my life. I should live only for *you*. You should do with me whatever—”

Diana turned away a little impatiently.

“ Ah, what made you do this ? how foolish, how unkind ! ”

“ Unkind ? ”

“ Yes, you have spoiled everything, and made us all uncomfortable. I did not think you would have done this. No, indeed.”

“ Spoiled everything ? ” he repeated, aghast.

“ So unkind, so cruel ! ” said she. “ We shall all break up here. You will have to go away ; I could not think of that. I am very sorry, dear Richard, to give you pain, I am indeed ; but it was very foolish of you. We were all going to be so pleasant, and have such fun, and you must turn it into this sort of serious thing.”

He looked at her seriously—his eyes moving angrily, his lips curling ; then he tossed back his head.

“ Of course, *you* can do as you like in that. But if it be for any other reason, I warn you about *that*. Dick Lugard can reckon with any man, and always has done so. I am not accustomed to be circumvented by cunning fellows without setting myself right.”

The young girl drew herself up haughtily, as she could do ; she came of a haughty stock.

“ You talk very oddly and strangely. I’ll never forgive you for this, for treating me so unkindly and rudely.”

A look of triumph came into Richard’s face. He *knew* his offhand, manly style was irresistible.

"Unkind!" he said eagerly, and catching her hand. "Not for all the world; not if I were to die, dearest, *dearest* Di! as I used to call you. I see you have forgiven me, and you do not quite hate me."

"Oh, don't, pray don't," said Diana, trying to set herself free. "Oh, you should not, you should not, indeed! Let me go; please do. I am very angry! Ah, there is Robert Bligh coming!"

Dick started, and gave a stamp of anger. Bligh had not seen them, but was hurrying across the garden and making for the house. As he passed the corner of *this* walk he stayed a moment irresolute, took a step or two towards them, then stopped. He seemed very pale.

"Ah, I thought so," said Dick, with triumph; "he had better not interfere with me!"

Diana had now quite recovered her old manner; her eyes were dancing—she was calling and beckoning to Bligh eagerly. Still he stayed irresolute, then advanced slowly.

"Why doesn't he come quicker? Tell me—tell me about the race."

He answered hurriedly, "I did not see it all. I was coming to the house to look for—with a message, that is—for my mother."

"Didn't wait to see the finish? There's a fellow," said Lugard with scorn.

Of this Bligh took not the least notice. He was never more collected.

"I must find her at once; and I am told poor D'Orsay has been hurt, and will never run again. Forgive me, but I *must* go. I *can't* stay." And he was gone.

Had they been listening attentively, they might both have heard a faint, very faint report, like a child's pop-gun—for the air was very still and clear. At that moment some of the charitable who had been standing round the hapless D'Orsay—lying there on his flank, with eyes fast glazing, "his back was broken," they had said—went and got a gun, and "put the poor beast out of his pain." The hapless rider—dulled, unconscious—

had been remoyed gently to the windmill. But there was no putting *him* out of pain, for by this time he knew nothing and felt nothing.

Bligh, though he said frantically to himself, as he rushed away, "How could I tell her? how are we to tell her?" had really taken the best way in the world of breaking it. There was something of a coming mystery in his manner, the shadow of a calamity.

She looked a little wildly at Lugard.

"Let us go in; let us follow him. Oh, dear! what does all this mean?" And she fluttered away, leaving Lugard far behind.

"Some of his pompous exaggeration," he said impatiently.

She was gone, lost to his sight, that poor orphan. She had a sense of that awful care already at her heart. At the open glass-doors she came on a tall, dark figure.

"Oh," Diana said, "what is this? Some dreadful thing has happened. Tell me, tell me, tell me!"

The stiff arms were opened to her. "My poor, poor child! Would to God I could give you good news! It is a cruel blow to fall on one so young!"





## BOOK THE SECOND.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### DESERTED DIANA.

**W**HEN a well-known owner of some old place, like Mr. Gay—a man whom neighbours had grown accustomed to for years, and whom they look upon as they do the market-cross ; known at cover-side, along the highroad, at board and at meeting—when such a familiar figure is known to have gone, and gone suddenly, the place which he once dwelt in seems to lie there “in state,” very much as the beloved remains had done during the dismal days that preceded the funeral. As we pass the gateway, going along the road, it is like looking at what divines call the “earthly tenement,” and the noble demesne seems itself to be stretched out there—blank, lifeless, solemn, and without a spirit.

What a loss Squire Gay was ! every one said. The hunting men felt it more acutely than any of the rest. The hounds had been, it was well known, “very shaky.” Now and again the men would not come forward as they ought. When money-pressure and debt were hindering their sport, how splendidly he had “stepped into the breach”—and a very wide one it was—and saved the hounds for that part of the county ! There were rueful

faces among the top-boot community when that sad news got abroad, with many a "Th' 'ounds will go now, sure!"—though it must be said that that honest face, and kindly offices, and greetings were regretted for themselves.

Even Mr. Pratt could have wished he had been wrong about D'Orsay's legs. "Poor Squire!" "No better man!" "Fine English gentleman!" "True sportsman!"—these changes were rung as vigorously as the parish bell that jangled on the procession to the graveyard. At that sad pageant (conducted, said the *Mercury*, "by Messrs. Debenham, of London, the eminent undertakers, in their own unsurpassed style"—the relatives of the late Duke of R—— had owned themselves more than satisfied by the way they had treated *him*) there were no more unselfish mourners than Mr. Pratt and his friends of the hunt.

Mr. Bowman had been left an executor with—much to his surprise—Robert Bligh. The *Mercury* was lavish in its praises of the forethought, "delicate consideration," and true liberality of those gentlemen. The reporter had indeed been entertained handsomely. Messrs. Debenham's people owned that since the duke's obsequies they had met nothing more gentlemanly or handsome. On Robert Bligh's shoulder all the trouble and management fell. Mr. Bowman took up the official position, and went through the dismal formality of his function with success.

Well might there be many inquiries at the door for Miss Diana. She had been, as it were, struck down, and was lying upstairs in a sort of dull stupefaction. She had heard death preached about in the churches, and could believe that it was a very awful and disagreeable thing—she could feel heartily and tenderly for those so cruelly afflicted; but she never dreamed for a moment that those terrors were to come into their house, any more than hunger, or poverty, or want of clothes. She had literally not known suffering of any sort, beyond once or twice—when, after much putting off, her dear father had at last forced himself to be stern, and brought her to a dentist's.

*That* day of torture marked an era. It does seem a little hard that those who have never suffered should thus suffer doubly from want of preparation : but this is the penalty of that impunity. She seemed to be numbed, cowed, and shrinking. So does the victim who has been struck on the head with a bar look vacantly, and reel a little before he falls. She had not wept, not shed a tear even, nor had she spoken a word—symptoms that not a little alarmed the old housekeeper. She was wild and frightened.

At this stage Lady Margaret came over, and, rustling and “fussing,” all but forced herself in, her husband’s office giving her a sort of footing. When she entered, with some trepidation, the room where Diana was sitting at a table with a lamp, the eyes of the fatherless girl seemed to rest on her with the same air of terrified doubt and inquiry. As the lady—awed and scared herself—advanced hesitating, Diana at last seemed to know her, and with a half-scream fled from her to the curtain, where she stood cowering and shrinking and trembling. As Lady Margaret described it afterwards, she seemed to have “withered off” into half her size. Always slight and fragile, she now seemed a mere vapour. Poor, deserted, helpless Diana ! Every soothing word, every step nearer of Lady Margaret, was checked by a low frightened cry. The good and well-meaning lady, whose arms, outspread with silks and laces, seemed like a ship’s mainsail, stood there embarrassed and shocked, the look of terror and agony increasing every moment, at every step she tried to take. Then the old housekeeper, who had seen, and knew the incidents and treatment of, such awful griefs, touched her, and with an air of authority took her from the room.

“Better leave her to herself, my lady. Wait until she cries, the poor lonely orphan.”

On the morning of the dreadful procession the Court was full and busy, and there were not a few who thought of the day the picture was presented. The whole county seemed to have arrived from far and near. For the

hunting men it was a rueful business enough. How many times did they say to each other, "Many is the pleasant morning we met here. Poor old Gay!" Then was added reflectively, "What'll become of the pack now?"

Messrs. Debenham had done wonders; it is surprising, indeed, considering the limited time given to such artists, what prodigies they perform. The senior partner of the firm, Mr. Sowden—Debenham was a mere fiction—directed in person. There was gold, silver, and velvet, and nodding plumes; and whole ranks of the lugubrious supernumeraries who assist on such occasions; and add theatrical horrors to what has an awful and dismal simplicity of its own, and stands in no need of false terrors. One of these days we shall think with contempt and repulsion of this scenical mourning.

Some sort of interest seemed to have roused Diana on this dismal morning; and when she heard the trampling of horses, the sound of wheels, and the low voices outside (the housekeeper told it below), she said in a low tone, "Do the hounds meet here again?" and then went over softly to the window. "The poor, poor orphan!" said the housekeeper, weeping herself; "God knows the sight she saw then!" Solemn nodding plumes, and white linen, and a glistening black wain, and the other awful paraphernalia. The place was peopled, crowded, with the sable mourners. Where was the cheerful and lively scarlet? Diana gave a piteous scream, and with her hands covering her pale face, flew to the door. There she was stopped; two stiff arms—soft and gentle to her—wound themselves about her; a stern voice grown tremulous with emotion, received her. Mrs. Bligh, filled with grief and pity for this deserted child, had her to her heart, and there, at this cold region, Diana seemed to find a faint glimpse of comfort; a few whispered words did more. For the first time, frantic bursts of tears came.

"You are not alone, darling," said the softened lady. "We cannot make up for him—for his loss; but would it not grieve his noble heart if he knew you were in this

state? Think of *that*, when you feel this despair coming back to you."

'There was not much in this: the most irresistible syllogism loses its force before the gentle argument of grief. Yet Diana often turned back to that moment, and that not injudicious speech of the comforter had some little effect. There were acts of kindness which often came back on Diana when this dismal time was afar off, lost in mist, like a cold chilling mountain seen at the end of a distant landscape. She had no trouble now, no work, no terrible responsibility, "which would have killed her." She remembered how those friends "had done everything," settled everything—Robert Bligh and Mrs. Bligh. Lady Margaret had indeed made protest and shown battle, but it was short. Mrs. Bligh was utterly changed, so was Robert; both were firm and efficient. Poor Mr. Bowman, with equal powers, was a cipher. No matter what one's office may be, it is the man that gives it influence. Those who had business *would* look to Mr. Bligh in spite of all Mr Bowman's—or rather Lady Margaret's—self-assertion.







## CHAPTER II.

### A VISIT.

**B**UT now these times are long passed by. The dead past has buried itself. The lugubrious days are locked up in a gloomy room and closet like the old plate—locked up now three, going on to four, years. So do we look back at a dreadful night—a night of shadows and horrors. But the young will be young ; and our Diana was now recovered and grown very grave, and sober, and demure ; and, in the half-mourning which she wore still, was beginning to discover that she was now a person of some importance. She was like one awaking, and even alarmed at her new responsibilities. It filled her mind, and prevented her thinking. But the picture in the hunting-coat—the artist's worst work ; it was not a Velasquez or a Titian—precious to her, with all its flaming reds, as her whole estate. The likeness was tolerable, though nothing could tone down the fiery coat ; but she always gave a little shudder as she came up to it—for the dogs and the whip, these recalled rather too much. Her position was indeed curious, and a little embarrassing. She had literally no female relations, and for a young girl this was awkward. Gradually it was noticed how she had fallen under Mrs. Bligh's directions. Lady Margaret was unwearied in her attentions ; rustling and bustling in, and dragging with her Mr. Bowman,

under cloak of his office as "the executor." Many were the lectures she gave that unhappy gentleman on the duties of that unlucky office.

"I wish to God," he often said in private, "that Gay had let me alone. That Bligh has done everything—a most sensible, longheaded fellow."

"Yes," said Lady Margaret, with some scorn, "which *you* are not. Can you do nothing for Canning? Why, another man with such advantages would never be out of the house a moment!"

Diana did not suspect their movements, but she rather shrank from Lady Margaret and her "bustling" way. It overpowered her; she shrank from any work, which somehow seemed associated with her lost father; she was delighted to be relieved. And thus, during the course of those three dismal years, she could do nothing without Mrs. Bligh. To Mrs. Bligh, indeed, she had gone; and a hundred little matters of business had been arranged by Robert, who was unwearied in his office. This involved much trouble and even interruptions to his profession: for the late Squire Gay's affairs had been left in some confusion, though not what is called embarrassed. There was a lawsuit, which Bligh adroitly, and after much difficulty and negotiation, succeeded in arranging.

Mr. Lugard senior was very pleasant on these friendly offices, and not at all restrained in his remarks. Many heard him at the various dinner-parties dwelling pleasantly on the "cleverness" of that lady, and the "invasion," as he called it. "Really, it was scarcely fair; a poor thing left in that way, and no one to look after her or protect her."

At last, one morning, or one week rather, Diana seemed to rouse herself, and the world to open again before her. The sun was shining, the broad acres of fair grass, of noble trees, spread away before her. The hideous dream was gone; she must begin to live again. That dear lost one was not to be thought of with horror or awe; but was now laid in softer, tender colours. And thus she was seen driving about, asking after this and that, even

writing letters ; she would soon be her old self. Now the sense of proprietorship was breaking on her gradually ; and when she was addressed as "the mistress," or asked for her directions, it was curious to see her face striving to compose itself to gravity and importance.

Three years, then, had gone by, and one morning the unaccustomed sounds of a horse galloping up the avenue are heard. Alas for the old days of the meet on the lawn—the overcrowded stables, the band of grooms, helpers, and the rest !

Diana was in, and was told there was a gentleman in the library who wished to see her. She had duties cast on her now ; so she went down with as grave a face as she could compose ; she was even a little cheerful. She gave a cry of surprise ; she knew the gentleman, though he was altered—grown taller, larger, and "harder." It was Richard Lugard—Captain Lugard.

"Oh, Dick, Dick !" she cried, "I am so glad !"

Somehow he seemed connected with the old, old times and the dear lost one, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I am so glad to see you," said Lugard, kindly. "It is *so* long ago, and so much has happened since—to *me*, I mean," he added hastily. "They told you all that?"

"Yes, I heard," she said, "about your marriage."

"Yes," he said in his old manner, "that was a fine thing for me, as they considered it—getting an heiress, and selling myself into a low, mean, huckstering family. I feel ashamed, I blush for myself, when I think of what I have done."

Diana looked at him a little alarmed.

"What, poor Kitty," she says, "Kitty Crowder? With all her faults, she was good, very good ; indeed she was."

"I don't complain of her ; she can only act according to her lights and the way she was brought up—foolishly enough, hungering after admiration, and being 'fast,' as they call it. I don't care for *that* ; and she is welcome. But the others—her vile family, that low father ! it is agony to me. You don't know *what* I suffer, Diana, and what *you* have made me suffer."

Again Diana started ! but she understood. Her eyes fell on the ground.

"You know what I am," he went on ; "my nature, my faults, my follies. It is entering into my very soul—their arrogance, and the *slavery* of it ; for I am helpless. I *must* depend on them. And even now, what has brought me over here—even in that I must depend on *him*."

"What ?" said Diana eagerly.

"You have not heard ?" he went on. "Why, the election. Don't you know that Hodges the member has died ? and my father telegraphed to me over in Ireland, and here I am. I am determined to succeed in *that*. It will take off my thoughts from this mean servility, and perhaps help me to independence. It is my only salvation. And you, dear Diana, though you have shown that you dislike me, will help me in this, I know ?"

"*Indeed* I will, Richard," said she warmly, and giving him her hand ; "and I pity you from my heart—*indeed* I do ; and if I could help you—"

"Ah, you *could* have done *that*," he said bitterly ; "you know we are old friends, and were children, and played on that lawn together ; so I can speak to you freely. You refused me. It was a pity—for *me*, I mean ; for it has wrecked more than one life. I don't know *why* you did it, and it is no matter now. I dare say because you liked *him*, as they all say you do."

"Say I do ? Who, pray ?" asked Diana.

"The people—the neighbours. I have been hearing of nothing else since last night, 'What will she do ?' 'Oh, that depends on Mr. Robert Bligh and his mamma.' One fellow said that it was all settled already, as good as signed and sealed."

"It is quite false," said Diana, colouring ; "utterly untrue. It is cruel and unkind."

"No, it is not," said Lugard gravely ; "it is time you should know. I am married, so *I* can have no motive. I have known you so long, I can speak plainly. I tell you, Diana, I have been astonished, amazed, during the few hours I have been down here. It is Bligh here, Bligh

there. The dear name of *Gay will soon not be heard at all*. Times are changed indeed. Poor old Gay Court!—It is my duty to speak to you, to warn you. Your name is too precious to be made so free with. You are young, but not so young as to be handed over helplessly—not to be able to write a letter, or settle your own business without the influence of a clever barrister and his more clever mamma, who may have her own ends in view.”

“No, no. She has been so kind,” said Diana, hesitatingly.

“The end in view is her son, for whom she would sacrifice all, and stick at nothing. I know women. I haven’t tramped from garrison to garrison without learning something. They say you are under their thumb, and this estate is no longer yours, but *his*—or as good as his.”

The colour came and went from Diana’s cheeks. She had never been spoken to in this way before.

“There,” he went on, his eyes sparkling; “so much for duty, and old regard, and affection, as we call it; for that I shall always have for you, Diana, whatever becomes of me, or however miserable I am. And now, if you are not angry, give me your promise that you will do what you can to help a poor old friend like me. Ah, but I know! *They* will not let you. *They* have the disposal, I suppose, of any interest that is going.”

“I promise you,” said Diana, with a little toss of her head. “You may depend on *me*, Richard.”

“And Lord Bellman, who is going to build the new house there, he will help me, I think.”

At this moment the door was opened, and a dark figure entered. She too started with surprise when she saw Lugard.

“How do you do?” she said, coldly. “I thought you were in Ireland.”

“So I was, Mrs. Bligh,” he answered; “but there is a good thorough service, which brought me here in a very few hours. I had an object in coming. Mrs. Bligh—not to lose a moment—I hope you are speaking to the future member for Calthorpe.”

And he made her a low and sarcastic bow.

Something like a flush came into Mrs. Bligh's well-dimpled cheeks. She could not answer.

"There's my horse getting chilled," he said; "it's my good father's animal. It just suits him, you know. I never saw any one getting so stout as he is! But I shall tell him some good news; it will put him in excellent humour. If he could only keep his shape as well as he does those beautiful teeth! I wish I had as good, Mrs. Bligh.—You have sent me away quite happy, Diana, now that you have given me your promise: goodbye."

And he went out, giving Mrs. Bligh a look half of exultation, half of defiance.

Lugard rode away with great satisfaction. His father would have said he was now getting sense and a little wit; but his father, now that Dick was married, was looking out for some one to take care of himself.

"My dear friend," he said, "now that we have *swarmed* you, as the bee-people say, and sent you out to another hive, I must really look seriously to myself. In twenty years or so I shall be an old man, and want some one to look after flannels, and all that sort of thing—some one really nice, and with good blood and a title, if possible. My dear boy, you would be neither said nor led: you would rush on. If you had only waited! But no matter now; only, if you watch me, you may learn a lesson that will be useful on another occasion."

Poor Dick Lugard! Every one knew his story: how he had been refused by Diana—*she* had not betrayed it; it is wonderful how these things *do* get out—and how he had made such an *awful* mistake, being bought by those low Crowders, as they would have bought a ton of their best and closest boiler-copper. *They* took it out of him, for they got no money, and it was said gave him very little, Kitty's being "tied-up" jealously and strictly by a knavish family attorney. The self-willed Richard had managed it all himself, and had disdained the services of his father's family solicitor, and had employed a "swell" London attorney, who had been very useful to him

"With all my heart," had said his father; "as you make your bed, my boy, so you must lie in it."

When he had left Gay Court, Mrs. Bligh stood beside Diana, and looked at her with a little wonder. Diana was flushed and confused, and even somewhat angry. The thought in her mind was, that a lady, an heiress possessing this vast power and estates, should have her name sacred—not to be talked of in such a manner. This was indeed a scrap of her dear old father's wisdom which she cherished like a verse of Scripture.

"You know, pet, when they have put me by in the old oak box, you'll have a very hard little card of your own to play. There is no one to help you. My God! what I ought to have done ten years ago was to have married some good woman, though indeed it would have gone against me. But, mind, be very careful, popsy; for you'll be well watched."

At last Mrs. Bligh spoke. "I was coming to tell you this very news. I have telegraphed to Robert from his circuit. At last his long-delayed opportunity has arrived, and my dear boy has well deserved it. I shall live to see him in Parliament, thank God!"

Diana was still confused, still flushed.

"I hope he will succeed," she said; "that is, I mean—poor Richard Lugard has just been here. Oh, you would pity him, you would, indeed. All his life has been shipwrecked. He has been sacrificed for money; all his best hopes gone!"

"What," said Mrs. Bligh coldly, "does he mean—does he dare to set himself up here in *that* way? If he has any *real* friend that commiserates him, he will dissuade him from that exhibition and certain failure."

"Oh, he will *not* fail," said Diana eagerly. "He must not; we will all help him."

At this strange turn Mrs. Bligh started.

"Help him!" she repeated. "*Help him! What! was that the promise?*"

Diana grew desperate. She thought of "the reports," of her own dignity, of her dear father's caution; and with

a trembling voice she said, "What I mean is, dear Mrs. Bligh, here am I in a very solitary, awkward position. No relation in the world *now*—none whatever; and dearest papa cautioned me,—you know he did, Mrs. Bligh. So I think it would be better, far better, that we were not mixed up in this affair at all. I am very young."

Mrs. Bligh was measuring her suspiciously, but she was much relieved. "Quite right, my dear child. You are always sensible; and it can be very well managed. Robert is very clever. You needn't appear at all; and there are ways of doing this. Poor fellow! at this moment he is posting on here. It has been the dream of his life, or one of them. It will make him so happy."

Her eyes were fixed on Diana, as if she was refuting some delusion or impression she saw in the young girl's mind. Diana looked restless, and moved her foot a little impatiently. The head presently gave a little toss.

"Sha'n't we go out and drive?" she said suddenly. "I have never visited Warrenhurst and the tenants of that part of the estate."

Mrs. Bligh went reflectively away to get her bonnet. This looked as though the little lady had at last roused herself, and was going to take the command. She was more surprised during the drive, when Diana went into the cottages and spoke to "her tenants" with a pleasant little air of patronage.







## CHAPTER III.

### THE RIVALS.

**JUST** before dinner-time that evening came driving up their old friend Robert—a little more thoughtful and solid in his air, having encountered many stiff cases and stiff witnesses since that fatal hunting-day. He was now indeed not a “rising junior,” as some of his rivals called him, but a leading junior. On a circuit that means a great deal; and a clever leading junior is more useful to a solicitor than a leading Q.C., of which pattern there are plenty always in stock. Robert explained all this to Diana at dinner that day. He had indeed grown gayer and more experienced in human nature. He was full of excitement now.

“We have only one other M.P. on our circuit. It will be a grand thing for us. Bullock says it is the first step on the ladder, but I think it looks more like the last. When *that* comes, I think we may kick away the ladder for good. We have lots of money. We shall fight the battle with spirit—poll to the last man, whoever opposes, if any one does.”

“If any one!” repeated Diana, laughing. “Why, haven’t you heard?”

“I have not had time to tell him,” said Mrs. Bligh. “What do you think of your old friend, Richard Lugard?”

He's posted here express. He says he will poll to the last man also."

Robert looked from one to the other, a little taken back.

"He can hardly be serious," he said; "though he is quite welcome, of course. Still, he will lose his time and money; for I suppose *that* is what he will go on."

"Oh, it will be great fun," said Diana, laughing, "to see a contest of this sort; and between you too, the old friends, the old enemies."

"His father, or some one who knows him, should dissuade him," said Robert, still thinking. "It would be only kindness; for I know he can have no chance. Why, with Lord Bellman against him, and all this estate against him—"

"Oh, as for *that*," said Diana, with a wise air of reflection and statesmanship, "I don't know. As yet, you see—"

"Don't know?" said Robert, looking round with surprise. "Why, mother dear, you told me—"

"So I did, Robert; and I confess I do not see what the meaning of this change is."

"Now, there!" said Diana, fretfully; "who is changed or changing? All I want is to be a little free, and choose for myself. I must be canvassed regularly. You know, Robert Bligh, I am in a very responsible position now, and Richard is an old friend too; and I must say, if you *are* this terrible Radical that would cut up and divide all our estates—"

Mrs. Bligh looked dark. Robert laughed very heartily; this notion so amused him.

"I see—I understand," he said. "It is quite right. I must submit my principles to a test. By the way, do you know the office I have laid out for myself this little vacation, Miss Diana? I mean to get all the papers below in proper order—sift, sort them all, so that you can put your hand on any you want at once; and having done that duty, I shall give you a proper account of my stewardship. I have some little surprises for you, Miss Diana."

"How kind, how good you have been to me!" said Diana, gratefully and warmly. "Indeed, I know it, and—"

There was a cheerful voice outside. "May I come in uninvited? What, the *other* candidate! How *are* you, Bligh? There you are, the same; as it now is and ever shall be! Look at him, casting up the lot, to see are the figures right, or has he got me somewhere? Well, Robert, do you find me changed?"

Bligh was looking at him, and did think him changed. He had got older-looking and coarser-looking; his eyes were wilder and freer; his face much tanned, his bearing more reckless, which was not too strong a word.

"I hear you have married since," said Robert, quietly, when the other had sat down and joined the party.

"Well, *that's* not such a wonder. So many people come up to me with a smirk, and say, 'Oh, so you have been married since!' as if it was some sly business, and that I had done it secretly, and wished it not to be known, but that *they* had found it out. You know that sort of air. It's insufferable, and insupportably impertinent. Mind, I don't mean *you*, Bligh, but in the outsiders."

"Of course not," said Robert, gravely.

"Of course not," repeated Lugard, with a half-insolent glance at Diana, and as though he meant "of course *yes*."

"Well, but what about *you*, my friend? what are these stories?"

"What stories?" said Bligh calmly.

"All right, then, since you *want* to know. I came down in the train with a dry and mouldy father-in-law sort of man. I soon made him out to be a barrister. Now, who do you think he was?"

"Mr. Buller," said Bligh, quietly. "He came down here a day or two ago."

"Divination! positive divination! Wonderful man! It was Buller, a Q.C. He told me all about himself, and his retiring from the profession, having made a colossal fortune."

Diana was looking from one to the other with a little surprise.

"And then he came to speak of his daughter. Ah, *that* touches! Look at him! I'm no lawyer, but I found it all out. He took quite a liking to me, and became so confidential. No wonder, after four hours in the train."

"But what did he tell you about his daughter?" said Diana, curiously. "I never heard—"

"Oh no, no," said Lugard in the same mocking tone; "I dare say not. These things are done so slyly. You can't imagine how confidential the old fellow and I got. As I say, I remembered all about him and our friend the moment I saw the name. He warmed up at once about him and about *Helen*. It was Helen here and Helen there, and *Robert* every minute. Nice goings on—nice doings! Thirty thousand pounds!"

"'Pon my word," said Bligh, smiling, "he must have told you a deal, and you certainly made good use of your time."

"I don't know about *that*," said Lugard, carelessly, and rising to open the door for the ladies. "That is as may be. Ah, Mr. Robert, nice goings on! Snug and quiet too. But I didn't tell all that the old fellow told."

"Folly!" said Bligh, going over to the fire. "Now, I want to speak to you in earnest. You are not serious in coming here to get up a contest. I mean, you can't really hope to have any success."

Lugard, just filling himself some wine, kept the decanter suspended, and looked at Bligh from foot to head.

"I am serious in every step I take. Why should you suppose that I should take the trouble of carrying out a jest of that sort with *you*?"

"That I can't undertake to explain," said Bligh, hastily. "Only I think it is scarcely fair of you to put one to all this expense and trouble, without the slightest chance of success, merely to gratify a—a—"

"Gratify a what? Pray don't think *that*. To gratify myself, if you like. No chance of success! What vanity and rubbish! Excuse me saying so, my dear Bligh. Your little success at the Bar seems to have quite inflated

you. Why shouldn't I compete with you? Are you exclusive cock of the walk here, in this county? Am I not on my own ground? My father's land is close by here. While you—excuse me reminding you of it—have not a rood in the county. Your mother has a garden and a paddock, or something of the sort—”

“Oh, I know that, of course,” said Bligh; “only after your knowing that I intended it, and after having taken so much trouble—”

“Well, I intended it all along too, and I shall take trouble too.”

“Well, I tell you as a friend,” said Bligh; “you may be wasting your time and trouble for nothing. Of course you can take your own way. I have made the ground tolerably sure; and really, in the face of all the support I have—”

“Oh, I see,” said Lugard, turning round in his chair and looking at him again from foot to head, “you count on her, the young lady of the house. That *is* bold of you, at any rate. You managed well, I hear, Master Robert—taken the whole concern into your own hands already—the estate, the affairs; and now you think you may represent us in Parliament, having such a *probable* stake in the country.”

“Don't let us talk any more about this, Lugard,” said the other quietly. “With me you always give everything *that* turn. I have not seen you now for some years, and here, the very first night we meet, you begin your old ways again. It was the same when we were at school together.”

“What do you mean by that?” said Lugard, his eyes flashing. “Is *that* what you plume yourself on? I make you a present of *that* victory. I see what's in your mind.”

“That has always been in your mind, evidently,” said Bligh, “and it seems to rankle there in a manner quite incomprehensible to me. But no matter; let us have no compliments, and do our best. I really meant it in kindness; and I give you every notice—expect no quarter from me.”

"Who wants it?" said the other. "You've not got me before you in one of your fusty courts of law, that you can hector and always have the last word. Come, let us go into the drawing-room, unless you want more wine. I don't."

Lugard talked a great deal to Diana that night, sitting in a favourite pose of his—stooping low, his head reclining on his hand, and looking into her face. The mother and son sat apart, and looking over, saw Diana's face playing with various expressions. Amusement, sympathy, interest, demureness—all followed each other in that expressive face. Our Diana was so glad to see her old friend, whom she had not met for so long, and who indeed had paid her the best compliment in his power.

After a while Robert rose, and said he would go downstairs "to duty," for "a field-night," as he called it, "among the papers."

"How kind of you!" said Diana. "I often thought of doing so myself; but the very sight of those dusty old papers would make me faint."

Mrs. Bligh gave him a strange look, which seemed to order him to remain; but Bligh would go to his office.

"What's this about papers?" asked Richard Lugard with a curious air, as he rose to go for the night.

"Oh, he is *so* kind!" said Diana. "I can't tell you the trouble he has taken. He is now going to set all my poor darling's papers in order, quite neat and nice for me; so that I shall have no trouble, and be able to lay my hand on anything I want. I assure you, those papers in tin boxes and bundles frighten me and make my head go round."

Lugard laughed. "My dear Diana, I am an old married man now, and entitled to give advice. Now, I must tell you again, all this looks very odd, and has been remarked upon a great deal. Robert Bligh is a very good fellow—the soul of honour, and all that—and means well; but, really, to allow *any one* to have the run of family papers in that way, to read everything and handle everything, is a privilege I declare I wouldn't allow my own father."

"Oh, Richard!" Diana said, greatly shocked.

"No; and what is more, a privilege he'd have too much delicacy to ask for, unless of course—and that's all a different matter—unless *the reports are true*; and then of course—"

Mr. Lugard went away that night in great spirits. He enjoyed his cigar, and sang as he went home. Robert sat into the watches of the night at his work, delving among the old letters and documents which the late squire had left in sad confusion. He was not quite so cheerful as Richard. He had been, in truth, much taken aback by the sudden appearance of his old schoolfellow in the character of an opponent. He had, indeed, reckoned on a smooth, pleasant progress. It seemed to augur badly. Diana went to her room very grave and thoughtful. For the first time she felt worried, and had begun to know *what the world was*.





## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CANDIDATES.

**T**HE whole district was presently astir with the coming conflict. The potwallopers of Calthorpe, as they were irreverently termed, were in great excitement. These gentlemen, it was well known, were scarcely "pure," and many of them were said substantially to help out their other means of livelihood by these elections, which happily recurred pretty often. A boon, too, for the *Mercury*—the candidates' addresses being kept in standing type, and charged for at election prices; the leaders, "accounts of the canvassing," "our own reporter," and what not. The *Mercury* had cast-in its lot with the rising young man and brilliant *altera spes Britannia*, Mr. Robert Bligh, perhaps quickened by the recollection of the old Gay-Court hospitalities or the sense of future favours from one "who was deservedly esteemed in ancestral halls." The *Mercury* was incessant—it sat up night and day; it travelled about express; it "stopped press" every now and again; it flourished exceedingly. Until one morning, "a wretched rag of a paper,"—that bought, as the *Mercury* told us all, three pages of its matter ready-printed from London, and filled up its remaining fourth with "advertisements begged, borrowed, or stolen,"—which only came out once a week, suddenly woke up into notice,



became bi-weekly, active, alive, vigorous. This "rag," whose more decorous name was *The Calthorpe Observer and General Remembrancer*, took the side of Mr. Richard Lugard—the *gentlemen's candidate*—and advocated his claims with something like scurrility. A Mr. Magaulay, well known on the London press as being able to "devil" a political article as you would "devil a kidney," came down specially—sent or lent, it was said, by the FLYING BANNER, the London Conservative organ. This officer certainly did good service. The great club, it was whispered, had lodged £900 to Mr. Lugard's credit in the branch office of the Universal Bank; the sinews of war were thus in plenty. On the other hand, it was known that Mr. Buller, "the eminent Q.C." as he was called in the *Mercury*, was actually staying at Irnston with his lovely and accomplished daughter and heiress, and was ready, it was said, with "sinews" on the other side.

Diana was secretly delighted with all this excitement; but she saw that the eyes of the county were on her, and was feeling her sense of responsibility more and more every day. She subscribed both to the *Mercury* and to the *Observer*, and certainly laughed and looked grave alternately over the dreadful language that was applied in the latter journal to her friend Robert. Mr. Bligh's opinions were of rather an advanced sort. The *Observer* denounced him as "a howling Radical, that would bring fire and sword into the country, and parcel out the land among his fellows. Mr. Lugard was an unflinching Conservative, one that stood by his own—what God and his forefathers had bequeathed to him; but at the same time would watch over the friendless and fatherless, the maid and the wife, the widow and the orphan.

Richard himself laughed loudly over the opinions imputed to him.

"As for watching over the widow and orphan, I decline it altogether. I have quite enough to do as it is." And his handsome eyes fell on the ground, and a deep sigh came from his breast.

Diana's soft eyes were turned on the ground also. She

knew what he alluded to. Poor Richard ! he often now spoke to her gloomily of what he called his shipwrecked hearth ; and Diana felt too much sympathy to notice the confusion of the metaphor.

A great coldness had sprung up between the two gentlemen. Lugard treated Bligh civilly, as they sometimes met at Diana's house.

"My opponent," he said, "is a Radical of the worst dye. I merely quote the *Observer*, the paper that does me the honour of giving me its support. I know nothing about it. There is a fellow called Macauley, or Magauley, who writes these things, but I have not the honour of his acquaintance."

"I am glad to hear it," said Robert, coldly, "for his language passes even the bounds of a county-town paper."

"You'd better not say that openly," laughed Lugard, "or you'll alienate your friend Cox of the *Mercury* ; you know him."

"I do," said Bligh, coldly ; "but not much—very slightly."

"Not much—and very slightly ? What a casuist ! I hope you don't inspire him with those slaughtering attacks on me. By the way, how is Mr. Buller ? I met him two days ago in Calthorpe, walking with his charming daughter, who, I suppose, has come to *electioneer*. 'Pon my word, our friend here won't miss a chance."

Again Diana looked curiously at Bligh, who made no answer. Something was rising in her little mind, to the effect that Mr. Robert Bligh was really so very clever—made everything serve his game—had half a dozen strings to his bow at once—and, in short, was rather too knowing in his manœuvres. She had made inquiries as to this apparition of "the famous Q.C.," and what the *Mercury* oddly spoke of as "the Q.C.'s lovely daughter," and discovered that they came very often to Calthorpe. She was seized with an eagerness to know or see them, and asked Mr. Lugard very often about them.

"She canvasses for him, I suppose," said Richard,

laughing ; “a very nice girl indeed ! And the father—I am having him watched ; and if I catch him dropping any of his guineas, as they say he is, I’ll expose him. Nice work, isn’t it ? Our virtuous friend Robert, so grave in his principles, descending to such dirty work ! But let him expect no quarter from me. This is too serious altogether.”

Within a week, when Diana was in her little pony-carriage and pair, which she drove herself—and a pretty picture it was to see her and her ponies, and the little “tiger” behind—she actually obtained the opportunity she desired ; for there, coming out of M’William’s drapery-shop, was an elderly legal-looking man, with a tall young girl on his arm. She knew at once this was the Q.C. and his daughter. Certainly a handsome girl, into whose mind came the same instinct, and who looked at Diana with a hard, cold, and bold stare, which rather scared her. Miss Ada Buller was a handsome girl, and deservedly admired by many a gay “stuff-gown” and opulent “sucking” solicitor, who, according to the old-fashioned phrase, sighed for her. These suitors she treated with infinite disdain ; and it was known that she and her “governor” had their eye on that dry chip of Nisi Prius, Robert Bligh. The look the two girls gave each other was curious indeed ; and Diana owned to herself, as she drove her ponies back, that Miss Buller was fine-looking and showy. They were now stopping in the neighbourhood with friends.

The news of our Diana having emerged from the dark caves of grief and mourning to the pleasant sunlight was not long in travelling to Lady Margaret and her family, who were up in town. That lady could generously condone the past, as indeed she always could do on every occasion through her life when the interest of her family required it. Before long she was down at Bowman, and in a still shorter time was flapping and rustling in on Diana, folding that tender little figure in all her mass of silks and laces—even entangling various loose gold chains and appendages in our Diana’s soft hair. She was

delighted to see this child again. Canning was away, but would be delighted too when he heard of it all. Nothing could exceed the kindness of the Brenners to him. He was always there! that is, they were always *asking* him there.

"But, my dear, Canning seems so insensible; another young man would be so flattered, you know. Poniatowski, of the Austrian Legation, has proposed twice, and been mysteriously refused.—Yes, dear; we have come here for this dreadful election. Poor Bowman! He says that it is expected that none of the county families shall be away from their posts. That fine young fellow Lugard, I hope he'll get in; we're all to support him. I'm told they call the other *the schoolmaster*. Ha, ha! funny isn't it?"

Diana was very young and very untrained; and the reader will see that it was only natural these unfortunate assaults on our leading hero should gradually be weakening that actual *romantic* respect with which a young girl should regard a young man whom she is to admire. No more unfortunate term than that of "*the schoolmaster*" could have been applied to forward this end; for the associations connected with that calling—a priggish air, the birch, &c.,—are most difficult to struggle against. It came back very often on Diana's mind.

It was a slight exaggeration of Lady Margaret's—not to use a harsher word—this saying she had come down for the election unless indeed she was thinking of the election of her cherished son into a *seat* that had more charms for her than any in the schedule. We may pass by as quite harmless the introduction of poor Mr. Bowman's quoted views about county families being at their post, there being daily so many opinions laid to that worthy gentleman's account as would certainly amaze and confound him, had he not been also trained to express no surprise. Part of Lady Margaret's views, which she now pressed very warmly upon Diana, was a proposal that that charming young girl should come with her to town, "and see a little of the world."

"My dear," she said, "we can't leave you shut up in this way. A girl of your prospects and fortune is obliged to

go out ; it becomes a duty. And really, with such responsibilities on you, darling—a *splendid estate* and this noble house—you should look about you, and see and get some one to help. There might be some one you'd like ; there are charming young men going about town.'

"Oh, Lady Margaret," said Diana, "I am not thinking of such a thing."

"Oh, but you know it is a duty, dear ; many and many's the time your dear father spoke to me about it, while a cloud came on his open brow."

They were just opposite the hunting-picture, now beginning to soften a little ; and Diana, looking towards it, and noting how the stiff face was turned towards her, saw in it a sweetness and a love, and an appeal, and a whole train of emotions of which the artist had certainly never dreamed. Every hour that picture was growing more precious.





## CHAPTER V.

### A CHANGE.

**O**NE evening Lugard came in. There was a look of triumph in his eye. He had a newspaper in his hand.

"What did I tell you?" he said; "a case of the cloven hoof indeed! Not that I think he has anything to do with it." He pointed with his finger to a passage. "It seems unkind to show you this; but it is a duty. I have a deep interest in you; and now that you are in a responsible situation, you should know all these things."

A little agitated, Diana took hold of the paper. It was our old friend the *Mercury*; but there were new proprietors. There were four lines of doggerel entitled

### SADNESS AND SUNSHINE.

Ah, why does "the Goddess of Hunting" thus sigh?

Ah, tell me the reason, I pray.

For *her* will her fate do admire-a-Bligh;

And soon will she cease to be *Gay*.

Diana coloured, and her lips were compressed. This was the first time her name had ever been dragged before the public.

"It is shocking—a gross lampoon," said Lugard. "Yet I acquit him; of course I do. But he might have prevented it; and he is morally accountable all the same. Is it not astonishing how these ruffians, the scum of the earth, can go such lengths? To attack a harmless girl, and drag her into their wretched politics! And now, if I may advise on this matter, you will let it rest, Diana. Leave it as it is. I know my opponent Bligh will fly off to have contradictions and apologies; but people always ask, 'What is this that is contradicted? I must get it.' And they will be paying half-a-crown a-piece for the old copies."

That sank deep into our Diana's mind. It was like a misfortune. Bligh himself came later; and his behaviour unhappily added to the effect.

"What has happened?" he said, smiling, as he saw her tragedy air, which he was often merry with.

"You have not seen it then, or heard—?"

"No," said Bligh. "Oh, the lines! But you don't mind them. They are below contempt; only to be laughed at."

"Only to be laughed at!" repeated Diana, greatly hurt. "Oh, surely not. It has sunk into my heart. To drag a poor girl in this way before the public! It is shocking, monstrous! Oh, I shall not recover it for a long, long time! But I did not think *you* would treat it so lightly."

"But I do not," said he; "the fact was, I thought you would have laughed, as you used to do at Mr. Pratt's hunting narratives. But I'll walk down and have an apology inserted at once."

"I *beg*, I implore," said Diana, with dignity, "that you will not do such a thing. It will only make it more talked about. People that have not seen it will be looking for the old copies."

She remembered Lugard's words. Bligh was accustomed to witnesses. He smiled.

"I see. I suppose it was Richard, my *friend*, that brought this here?"

"It makes no matter now," said Diana. "I am sure

I am greatly to be pitied, and it is most distressing and miserable ; and if my poor darling was alive—”

The lines made a deep impression in the county. They were considered “so good,” the funniest, drollest things ; and certainly Richard Lugard was so far right, that the old copies were sought for with avidity. Lady Margaret, who came over very often now, dwelt much on it.

“I am an old woman that has seen life, and knows a little more than *you* suspect, or *could* know ; and so I can speak freely. You see this shows you it won’t do ; it can’t. A pretty, charming girl like you, with a great house and estate like this to manage—all that on these little shoulders ! You have no idea of the malice of the creatures. As Bowman says, the way the men talk at the clubs ! Not that you haven’t obligations to these Blighs ; and I am sure they have the best intentions,—that is, *he* has ; for I know very little of *her*,—but it cannot do. Bowman prophesied this ; I must do him that justice. If you could look out some nice friend whom you liked and respected, and who has the advantages of society and position, and get her to chaperone you—I assure you, my darling child, I am only speaking for your good ; and it’s what Bowman says, and what Canning says, and what we all say. And at nights I am very much disturbed about it, and lie awake thinking over it.”

These counsels sank deep into the heart of our Diana. They were well meant, though they were not a little artful. From that affair of the lines and from its associations Diana’s eyes turned away with a sort of horror. Her name “dragged through the mire !”—an expression of Lugard’s,—it scared and terrified her.

All this time the canvassing was going on briskly. The principles of the two candidates were before the country. If we took them broadly, it must be said that Lugard’s were Conservative or Tory ; and Bligh’s Radical. But the latter would not accept that designation ; he was “an advanced Liberal.” To Prosser, the Radical saddler, he was of course a Radical. Richard Lugard described him scornfully.



"I don't pretend to understand such refinements—I don't indeed. 'Advanced' rubbish, and casuistry of that kind—it's not at all in my way. I am one thing or the other. There are only two honest colours in politics—black and white. The fellows he's asking to put him in want to cut up your land and mine, and divide it into equal portions. I respect them; I respect Prosser, who says so openly. The proof of it is, I have got many a saddle from him. He knows, perhaps as well as I do, that he will never live to see his principles in force, and that his grandchildren will never see them either. But he sticks to them honestly, and says so honestly. But, hang it! to have a man refining, and half one thing, half another—afraid to say he is that or t'other—to be a Radical in talk and essays, but to go no farther—'pon my word, of the two I prefer the saddler. Now, here am I—plain and straightforward—a Conservative Liberal, if you like—willing to live and let live, and all that. But none of your half-and-halves—Liberal or advanced Conservative, and all that."

All this time, too, Robert was looking on patiently—making good his ground, up betimes, and at nights coming to Gay Court to settle the papers in the study. He had an object in this; he had begun to see the change in Diana; he was determined to wind up his stewardship, finish honourably what he had undertaken, and then call to his aid all his old training and discipline, and with an effort tear that pleasant and delightful image from his heart. As he sat below in Mr. Gay's study, surrounded with papers, he felt dismal enough.

"It was all her dream, poor soul," he said to himself, thinking of his mother; "and a comfort to her, but a wild folly. I should never have listened to it a moment; I said so, and thought so, all through. It will be a trial and suffering, but I must do it, and do it at once. I have no business with such luxuries as love, or with darlings like her. I always saw that manner in her to me. I was too sober and grave; far too *wise*. Girls have a

contempt for the wise. And if I had read at all, or knew anything, I might have found that out."

That night's post brought him as usual a mail of letters, one in a hand which was familiar, and the sight of which agitated him a little. It was from Lord Bellman, and ran as follows:—

"DEAR SIR,—I shall find myself in England, after all, about the time of our election. I regret very much I shall not be able to give you the support I hoped. To speak frankly, I am disappointed in your platform, as the Americans say, of principles. From what I have heard, I could not give my vote to one who talks so mistily—forgive me for saying so—of the relations of landlord and tenant. I quite understand that you are more of the *doctrinaire*, and do not go the length of that fellow Prosser; but still, when you are put forward by such people, and when we have a good thorough-going Conservative candidate, conscience steps in. Mr. Richard Lugard called on me yesterday, and did me the honour of explaining at length his political creed. I must say, after that, I could hesitate no longer. You will recollect I gave no distinct promise; though I feel I should like to show how much I am indebted for the useful legal advice you gave, which the event quite justified. But once principle or conscience interposes, the sense of private obligation must give way.—I am yours, &c.,

BELLMAN."

This letter was a shock. He had always counted on Lord Bellman, who was indeed what is called a Liberal. He had some influence in Calthorpe; but his name and the credit of his support would go for a great deal. It was well known that his lordship was "building" on his new estate. "Middle-aged Jenkinson," his lordship's architect, had been down choosing a site. Here was the prospect of employment, orders to the shopkeepers, &c. The registered voters of Calthorpe were only two hundred and fifty or so.

Mr. Bligh then laboured among the papers with a greater zeal now that he had finally come to this determination. The papers were in sad disorder. There

were abundant law documents, for the Gay family had always been fond of litigation, even the late amiable owner. But his proceedings were always taken about favourite or public-spirited subjects; and Bligh smiled as he took up the papers. "Injunction in the case of the Warrenhurst Watercourse," "Right of way through the Bashley Meadows,—Gay *v.* Wether." They were mostly for the public good—for the neighbours, or the hounds, or the hunt, or for sport. Here, too, were the letters of a century back—yellow, torn, and in bundles, and mixed with old accounts and inventories. He had been careful to obtain from Diana the most precise instructions, and the fullest permission to read these papers—"those musty old things," the very air of which frightened her, and on which indeed she had gravely consulted him as to the propriety of a wholesale burning. But when he assured her gravely that this was a *duty*, that every family took a pride in their papers, and that Mr. Gay had often talked to him of "building a muniment-room," Diana grew quite eager. There were all sorts of letters—home and from abroad; one little bundle from a "George Gay," who he knew was the young officer in the drawing-room, Mr. Gay's elder brother, who had rather disgraced him. Here were all his letters, written when he was "under a cloud" at Boulogne—some penitent, some defiant and obdurate, some pleasant and in high spirits, describing life and manners. These were curious, and he put them aside. He stayed very late that night, and walked home about midnight. Diana was then fast asleep. When he entered his own house, he found a light burning, and his mother sitting up.

"There are letters for you," she said. "One from Lord Bellman to me. You have lost him. That is some more of that Lugard's intrigues."

"He is working hard," said Robert, gloomily. "But why are you sitting up in this way, mother?"

"I can't go to sleep so early," she said. "Do you know, Robert, I begin to be afraid? If anything should happen, I shall know to whose account to put it."

"After all, mother, it is all fair competition on *his* side."

"I am not talking of *him*. But of that *false, wicked* girl—"

"Who, mother?" repeated Bligh, astonished; "not Diana, surely?"

"Who else? False, cruel, ungrateful girl! Let her take care what she is about, and not trifle with *me*. A contemptible child like that to attempt—to *dare* to try a game of that sort against me!"

"My dear mother," said he, alarmed at her manner, "you must recollect she is a child."

"You call her a child; you don't think it. Is she such a child as you would take home?—that you love, and have loved in your heart of hearts since you were a boy? No, Robert, you don't think her a child."

"Well, I do not. And I *do* love her—and did. But, my dear, I have found out long since that was *all* a dream, born of your good nature and interest in me. And only this very night I have come to the resolution of finally giving all up, and going back to my true and proper love—my old mouldy profession. It is all I am fit for. I have seen a great change in her, which perhaps you did not. She wants to look about, to be independent, to know her power, to see the young and the handsome, and I think she is right."

"I have seen all this too," she said, sadly. "Oh, my poor Robert, yes. She has listened to our enemies, and ungratefully. But I say, Robert, I shall take care of you. I shall not let you be outraged and mortified by any one like her. Tell me what kept you so late. Never mind," said Mrs. Bligh, growing more and more excited; "she little dreams what she owes to us, or what a helpless creature I could make her. Her head is turned by a position she is not fit for."

"She is so young," said Bligh.

"That is nothing. And if she is base enough to be ungrateful, let her take care. I say no more."

"As usual," he said with alacrity, wishing to change the subject, "I was duly settling the papers; such

strange documents, old letters, and some that seemed so interesting. To-night I came on a whole bundle from that George Gay—from abroad."

"Yes," said Mrs. Bligh, starting, "she has no reason to be proud of that. I could tell some stories, if I chose—"

"Now, my dear mother," said Bligh, taking her hand kindly, "I am sorry to see you so hostile. It is all quite premature. Poor Diana has done nothing as yet. When the time comes she will do everything that is right and kind."

"Poor Robert!" said Mrs. Bligh, "always hopeful, and too passive. You do not see what I see. However, let us do nothing in a hurry."

Yet Robert went to his room that night not a little troubled and dispirited.





## CHAPTER VI.

### THE ELECTION DAY.

**T**HE election time had at last come round, and the nomination day. The Calthorpe court-house had been filled. There was infinite excitement, for few remembered a contest which promised to be so closely run. The corrupt Calthorpe voters roared and bellowed in the street. The rival mobs, well filled with drink, meat, and money, proclaimed their favourite, and fought each other in the usual way. It was known that they were very evenly divided, each being sure of about a hundred and ten voters; and it was known that there was a balance of some thirty or forty hesitating or conscientious men, who could not, would not decide until the last moment.

There was a ladies' gallery in the court-house; and there was seen the young mistress of Gay Court, sitting beside her friend Lady Margaret. She was in great excitement, and could hardly restrain herself, laughing or smiling when the speech-making began; and if any one looked at her she smiled at them. It was indeed exciting. The two candidates excited much interest; Bligh, so grave and thoughtful, with a bright clear brow, watching everything warily. But the good-looking, bold-defiant Lugard, with an air of triumphant good humour in his eyes, was certainly the more popular of the two.

Thought, wisdom, and "all that," is very well ; but under those gifts is a suggestion of selfishness. They are treasures for the owner's use and advancement. Good looks, good humour, and cheerfulness we have all a direct interest in, and like rather better. Indeed, everything seemed to go well with Richard, for here was Lord Bellman rising to propose his friend.

("I am no diplomatist," said Dick, in his off-hand way, "and cannot do clever letters or demurrers, and that line of business ; but the idea just occurred to me one night, and off I set in the morning ; was in town by the afternoon ; called on his lordship, and asked him plump. Here he is now.")

Lord Bellman made a very pleasant speech, in which there was a good deal about himself and about his son ("who he hoped, please God, would soon be able to come among them and take them by the hand"), and about the ladies. He dwelt a good deal on what he called the "old principles ;" about his hoping to be allowed to transmit the lands he had received from Providence to his children :—that in the times in which they lived it behoved every man to range himself on the side of order and loyalty. He knew both candidates ; and that placed him in rather an embarrassing position : he could wish both success from his heart. Both were clever, both good-looking ; *but the ladies were judges of that* : and it was only a sense of duty and *conscience*—he was old fashioned enough to keep that article still—that made him stand by his principles.

Bligh was proposed by an influential Calthorpeian, not nearly so distinguished as Lord Bellman, but an employer, and who commanded some twenty votes at least : no speaker, and who merely said a few words. He was heartily groaned at ; for Dick's mob were the noisiest, and had most drink.

There was a lady sitting on the other side of Diana, whom Bligh remembered as the former gay and "dashing" Kitty Crowder. She was now utterly changed ; silent, melancholy, and pensive, with an air of suffering.

The Calthorpe gossips had noticed this at once, and drew the usual charitable conclusion. "It had not turned out well; poor soul, she had a sad life with *him*; they knew *he* would tame her awful temper." Tamed she certainly had been; and having now been brought down for this exciting day, she had come to stay with her old friend Diana at Gay Court. There our heroine treated her with infinite sympathy and kindness; not that she accepted the gossips' stories, but she saw, *and had always seen*, that her nature would *never suit* one like Richard's. Surely, too, there is always an interest in an affair of this sort,—to see what has been offered to you, how another deals with it. It is the foundation of a very dramatic sympathy. So Diana was really glad to have back her old friend, whose case she commiserated; and Kitty told her all her trials; though Diana did not accept her over-coloured account, but made due allowance for poor Kitty's incompatibility.

As a matter of course Richard Lugard came over very often to see his wife, and was very sarcastic and satirical on her and her former life—sometimes rough and rude, to Diana's great pain. Once or twice, indeed, the unhappy girl had turned on him, and there was a very unpleasant scene, which gave Diana quite a shock—took away all power of speech, especially as the husband and wife kept on attacking each other regardless of her presence, with fiery cheeks and no less fiery eyes. Poor Kitty, she had made a mistake indeed!

At last the two candidates had to make their speeches. Richard first, which was quite characteristic of himself—off-hand, bold, cheerful, and a little sarcastic on Robert. He had, he knew, his own defects—no one better. As regarded his friend there, he could not hold a candle to him—whatever that meant; but all he could say was, if he had one of his friend Hocker's—whom he saw on his right—good candles in his hand, he'd hold it to royalty itself, and not be ashamed. Hocker's candles they might all be proud of, and their light would show the defects or merits of any one. This capital local allusion got Richard



two votes on the spot. He himself was the hare, his friend Mr. Bligh the tortoise. He knew that, commercially, the tortoise was a more valuable animal ; but he always remembered that the hare had been beaten through its own fault. He had no notion of stopping on the road to take a nap, or commit any such folly. For the last fortnight he had hardly time to eat, drink, or sleep ; so, if not a fleet hare, he was at least a very industrious one. He then, with a little wonder, said he was surprised at his friend coming there at all. A man who was in such practice at the Bar, so engrossed with his briefs, could not spare time to canvass—certainly not to attend to the duties of his membership. What interest could *he* have in their concerns, unless to use them—which every lawyer did, and he did not blame them—as a stepping stone for promotion ? His friend had no stake in the county ; and he had told him, with the utmost frankness and good will, for they were old friends and schoolfellows, that he had no business to come there. He (Lugard) owed him a lesson, in return for a very old one when they had been schoolboys, and when his friend gave him as good a thrashing in the Latin grammar as ever he got in his life. Now he intended to give him a good thrashing in return. A great shout.

Then came Robert's turn. He was accustomed to speaking, but he felt anything but eloquent as he rose. The sympathies of the crowd he knew had gone with the last speaker ; and when they saw his thoughtful face and wise air, they seemed to anticipate they were in for a lecture and learned exposition. They were not very far out ; for Bligh had felt it necessary to give an exposition of his *principles*, which had been so cruelly vilified in that hireling print the *Observer*, and which should be carried on the wings of the *Mercury* over the length and breadth of the country. He wished to explain how far he would go. He spoke very well, very carefully rounding his sentences, and with a certain legal eloquence ; but it sounded a little heavy after the rattling, off-hand periods of the soldier. He felt dry and

uneloquent. He certainly did set out his principles, proved logically that he was no Radical, and made a sound, practical, and even, towards the end, a spirited speech. The applause was loud at the close, and the "show of hands" was declared to be for Richard Lugard.

These were exciting days; for the following one, Richard Lugard roused himself indeed, and spent them, as he said, "in the open air." His fresh, open face—and it never looked more handsome—was seen everywhere; his gay voice was heard in every voter's house. The off-hand officer described pleasantly to Diana how many children, and old virgins sometimes, he had to kiss; though he passed over some of these favours, which he had distributed to more suitable objects.

Diana indeed caught the whole spirit and excitement of the situation. She felt an irresistible sympathy for this gay, bold *militaire*, and not nearly so much for Robert Bligh, who, now gloomy, and a prey to a sort of depression, rarely showed himself, and then spoke little. With a careful avoidance, he never alluded to the subject of "*her influence*," which indeed she was not so sorry for. Lugard always said, "You know I have your solemn word and promise, Diana;" at which she laughed.

At last here was the day itself. For the candidate, how unpleasant such excitement—too prolonged, almost wearying. It is like the dice-box kept down for an hour before being raised—the cast on which a fortune has been staked. The weeks and months, the sums of money, the hosts of agents, the long days of "dirty work," the degrading leek that has to be swallowed again and again, until the heart is sick—all is under the dice-box during that day. Now and again the corner is just raised, and he thinks he sees the glorious "sixes," as reports come in, always hopeful, invariably full of comfort. If he is behindhand at the beginning, the adversary "polls his best at first;" and if he is ahead himself, that speaks for itself, and is at least no discouragement. Think of the moment when the clock has struck, and the books

are closed, and the last "totting" is going on. So it was with our two candidates at Calthorpe. They were "neck and neck" all day. When Lugard was 100, Bligh was 102; when, towards three o'clock, Lugard was 120, Bligh was 118. It was hot—too hot to be pleasant.

Diana was at home, in a perfect fever. She could not sit down, or work, or even go out. Now again came an express from one or other of her two friends, telling of their progress. Dick's were always in *his own* hand—full, and good-natured. He had great tact, after all, or knowledge of the world. Bligh, either from pride, or perhaps not thinking it of importance, let his agents do this little office. By such trifles, however, are the grand achievements of life carried out.

Towards three she was at the window; Kitty, far more indifferent, sitting at the fire, gazing into the coals. Suddenly they heard the sound of horse's hoofs. What was that—another express? It seemed to betoken something; and in a moment the door was opened, and Richard, flushed, eager, and handsome, rushed in.

"Oh, Richard, Richard! what news?"

"The worst," said Richard, hurriedly. "Unless you come to my aid, it is all over. We have polled our last fellow, and so has he also."

"Well?" said Diana, breathless.

Kitty was looking round from the fire coldly.

"But what is to be done?" went on Diana eagerly.

"How can I save you?"

Poor Robert! she had forgotten him for the moment.

"What's to be done? Ah! you won't do it; you won't help me. And yet the precious moments are flying."

"But what *can* we do? Tell me, dear Richard."

"This. There are three or four fellows there who say they know you want them to support Mr. Robert, and will be angry if they should not. This is only more of the precious stories he or his agents have sent about. 'Pon my word, they have electioneered with your name well!"

Diana looked haughtily round. This *was* indeed too much, after all she had suffered from reports.

"To drag your sacred name into these wretched conflicts! I would have scorned it. Mr. Bligh seems to think he will not only sit for Calthorpe, but for—"

"Oh, it is cruel, unkind, unmanly. What can I do, though? I must put down these unkind reports."

"Well, it is only justice to yourself. Oh heavens! to think of the prize just within my grasp. All my money—which God knows how I shall ever pay back—all lost. I shall be ruined indeed now, and care little what becomes of me."

Enter now Mr. Lugard senior—excited for him—and Lady Margaret, much excited. Mr. Lugard says,

"Miss Diana, you can save the day yet for your poor old friend Dick. I have ridden out from Calthorpe, and spent an hour with those pigheaded rascals; but it's no use."

"Diana, darling, you must not really," said Lady Margaret. "I am told it is really shocking the way they are using your name. 'Miss Gay wishes that; Miss Gay wishes this.' A young girl like you! it is very, very unfair."

"Unfair!" said Mr. Lugard senior; "it is scandalous. Mr. Bligh seems to reckon on being the master here; ordering in the tenants, I suppose."

Diana thought for a moment of Robert's wistful face; but the opinions of these artful people of the world—she, a young, inexperienced girl—the sense of her wrongs, of her being so fatally compromised—the sense of the pressing danger, and necessity of doing something promptly to dispel these fatal reports—quite took away all reason. She was frightened—in their hands. The crowd in the room, all indignant; the certain ruin to come on poor Dick—

"What must be done?" she asked.

"Just a letter," said Dick; "a few lines which can be shown. Don't tell them they are not to vote for him. I don't want *that*. It wouldn't be fair; and let us be fair to him."

"Yes ; simply write," said Lugard senior, "that you have no interest in either ; and you *request*, and order, so far as you have any influence, that they will vote for the candidate *they like best*. You owe this to yourself, Miss Diana. What could be fairer ?"

Diana went over to her little desk and wrote. Poor Robert ! Dick and his father interchanged glances. It was written, and put into Dick's hand. In a moment he was on his horse.

"This will do for you, Master Robert," he said.

At four o'clock, when the polling ceased, Richard Lugard, Esq., was known in Calthorpe to be duly elected by a majority of SIX VOTES.





## CHAPTER VII.

### A WARNING.

**W**HEN Diana had taken that step, and Richard had ridden away, a reaction came. The image of her other friend—the hard-working, honest, true Robert Bligh—rose before her. It scarcely seemed a *kind* return for all that he had done. His steady, unwearying kindness; his simple, unobtrusive devotion; his honest, generous heart, which she knew, though he had never told her, was all hers. She was a little indignant with herself. But he *might* win: and then, poor, handsome Richard, whose life had been so sacrificed, was he to lose in everything? Robert, tortoise-like, was sure to get on eventually; and really it was very provoking that they should be so free with her name.

Such fluctuations were in the mind of our Diana. She was very young, it must be recollected. When Lady Margaret burst in joyfully with the news of Richard's victory, it was for Diana a sort of shock. But the noisy congratulations of the lady; the excitement; the details of the closeness of the contest; the unbounded happiness of Richard, who was now indeed saved, and actually posting along the high road to bear her the news himself and express his gratitude, took off all her thoughts. It was a festival. She was in agitation, and could not help being glad when the hero came in, and almost cast

himself at her feet, in a tumult of joy, gratitude, and triumph.

"I owe it all to you," he said, "Diana. *You* have made me M.P., and I shall never forget it. A new life opens before me,—new hopes, new ideas, ambition, getting on,—something far above mere cantering and soldiering. Diana, you shall see what I can do. I am *your* representative, and feel I have great responsibility. As for Robert Bligh, he will console himself, and I will do what I can for him. He will get on in some other way, never fear. He knows how to fall on his legs."

Then that exciting, cunning Lady Margaret began to talk seriously of plans and prospects.

"Now that we have got over this odious election, dear," she said, "we must think what is to be done. Now you can *not* go on staying here in this way. See the little difficulty you were in this very morning, darling; and you may be *sure* those odious papers will not stop here. After this business they will set to work afresh. I've a letter from Canning, who says this is going to be a great season. The Brenners, he says, are to give two balls, with tableaux and charades. She, Christine Brenner, who admires *him*, you know, to be Judith, and —— all that," added Lady Margaret, not being able to recollect the name of any new character. "Town never was to be so gay. I have got Bowman at last to take a house in Portman-square. We pay an *awful* price for it, dear; but still, dear, the Muley Moloch of fashion requires all this cost. Now, dear, you must come to us. Indeed, it is a duty. I assure you the dear darling that is gone often and often talked to me over this, and so anxiously. 'She has no one,' he would say, 'unless you and Bowman, to look after her.' And of course I promised I would."

Diana was greatly struck—almost, in fact, taken by storm—by the intrepid Lady Margaret, who had determined indeed to carry this little weak citadel at once and by escalade. Before she left, she got a promise from Diana that she would go.

That night about eight o'clock Diana had another

more serious interview. She saw a figure standing before her, a pale face. And she heard a voice that spoke to her calmly and without emotion.

"I have come to see you, Miss Gay, for the last time. I am going away in the morning."

"Going away!" said she, the old feeling coming back in a torrent on her. "Oh, Robert, what must you have thought of me? But I did it for the best; I mean, I was taken by surprise, and poor Richard—"

"I have not come to bring you to an account," he said. "You were quite entitled to do what you did. But it has been a great shock to me; and you will forgive me if I say I think it was unkind and cruel." The cold Robert—that *felt* nothing, nothing—was speaking with great warmth and agitation now. "Cruel and ungenerous. What have I done to you? All my life long, since I was a child, I looked to you, Diana—I confess it; thought of no one else. All my life I have turned to you, worked for you, dreamed of you—*like a fool, as I was*. This last step I should never have undertaken, but for you—*like a fool, as I was*."

"Oh Robert, indeed, *indeed* I did not mean it. But they all came round me, and crowded in here, and I forgot, and lost my foolish head; and it *was* ungrateful."

"No, I do not say that; I do not complain. But you *deceived* me; or rather, indeed, my own old folly and infatuation. But now I shall see differently; I shall live for something else. I do not care to tell you that I loved you—loved you, oh, so much!—loved you in spite of everything—of suspicions; in spite of your behaviour to me, which at all times has been doubtful, and ought to have opened the eyes of any man with sense. But that is all over. I have sense enough left to have will and power to tear your image from my heart, where it has been so long."

"Oh, Robert, you speak so unkindly. What *shall* I do, if you leave me in this way?"

"I do not complain; nor have I any anger. And indeed, Diana," he added, more softly, "I acquit you. But I cannot afford to get any more of these rude lessons."



They cost too much in suffering. I can now go back to the old routine, which I should never have abandoned, and never shall again. But I have discharged my part. You will find everything in order, papers—all. That law-suit which you were afraid of is happily settled. I had not time to tell you, I was so busy with this—and other things. And let me say that if ever the new friends begin to fail you, and you want *real* help, a letter will bring me to you, and I will do my best, as of old. There, good-bye, Diana, if I may call you so; and good-bye also to an old and dear dream.”

Who would think that this was the dry, wise Robert, so cold and sober? It was indeed a warm, passionate Robert. Diana—our foolish, irresolute Diana—was deeply touched, and even shocked, at her own behaviour. She could only utter faintly that she meant nothing, and that she indeed liked Robert always, and that he was very unkind to go off in that way.

“Good-bye, Diana,” he said; “I go back to my trusty friends—those dear books, who never desert me or treat me unkindly—never, I trust, to leave them again. Do not forget what I said; if you are ever in a difficulty, call on, send for me. I can be of use still, and will do my best for the sake of some old happy days.”

Diana tried to make a faint protest. When she saw him going, she called out faintly,

“Oh, Robert, you won’t leave me in that way?”

But he was gone.

Diana, left to herself, was at first not a little pettish at her commands being disobeyed, and her little *amende* not being accepted; but soon a sense of her own behaviour came back upon her. She felt that she had behaved with some cruelty and ingratitude. She was inclined to cry, but then she thought she would write a sweet, pretty little note, begging forgiveness, asking him to make it up. This child of nature did not see that this could hardly make up for the positive injury her waywardness had done her old friend. But her note was written, and sent over that night.

There was no answer. The next day she drove over herself in her little carriage. She was told that Mr. Robert had left. She wondered that Mrs. Bligh had not come to her. She went in, not without a little awe of that lady.

Mrs. Bligh was sitting at her desk, cold and stony.

A fierce eye rested on Diana.

"So Robert has gone away? I am afraid he is angry with me; and I sent a letter, and I wished to explain: for I am afraid I behaved very unkindly—at least, it *seemed* so. But I never meant—"

And then the fluttering Diana stopped, and could say no more; for the hard, stern, and hostile gaze with which the mother was measuring her, filled her with terror.

"All this comes too late, Miss Gay; too late for him, and too late for *me*. No repentance can make up to him now for that injury."

"But I was worked on; people came in and persuaded me," said Diana.

"Yes; but you were not persuaded by him who had the first claim on you. No, you waited coldly and cruelly to the last moment to give him that stab. He may forgive you, and I dare say will; but I give you fair notice, Diana Gay, I never can."

"You never can!" repeated Diana, stepping back.

"I never can," repeated Mrs. Bligh. "You have wrecked his happiness in every way. He had set his whole heart on this, his whole purse. For years, too, one thought had buoyed him up, which he had set his heart on—that you had *some* regard for him. Oh, if you knew how that thought cheered and led him forward; how, in all his weary studies, he had that one thought before him—a dream, certainly, as he knew himself, but out of which it was heartless to awake him. His whole life will be coloured by it. And do not think for a moment that I shall forget it. Expect nothing from me but hostility—nothing but *punishment*."

Diana started and looked round frightened.

"Punishment! Oh, Mrs. Bligh!"

"Yes; retribution. You must bitterly atone for this. You made him suffer, and shall be made to suffer yourself. You little know the peril you stand in—you, you weak, cruel child—for you are no more. You should have kept the only two friends you had in the world, for you have no friends. At this moment you are helpless, for you have lost us. Now you will go into the world, and you will be amused and dazzled for a time. But you will find difficulties and embarrassments gathering about you, and you will have no one to call on. Richard Lugard, you will say; Lady Margaret;—fine friends indeed! *They* will help you. You will call on him—on Robert; but he will not come to you. Even at this moment you know not what is preparing—what is impending. There is nothing more between you and us, Diana Gay; and you take it as a last act of grace that I give you this final warning to prepare for what you should have had prudence—if not common gratitude—to avert. Now, on your own head be it!"

Diana, quite terror-struck at this ominous denunciation, could not answer. Never had such terrible words been spoken to her before. A chill came to her heart; and before she could collect herself she was alone. It all came back on her very often, and she drove home very sad and grave and humiliated; for it then occurred to her that she actually had no friends—no one she could consult, that loved her, that she could fly to. And above all, there was that strange indistinct menace, which sent the chill to her heart.

She arrived at home very serious. But there were Lady Margaret and "Mr. Richard Lugard, M.P.," waiting for her, full of hope and spirits and plans. Lady Margaret had come to absorb her—to fix a day. The house was ready. Richard was going to town also, to take his seat. What fun they should have, what parties, what a new life for Diana! Anticipation colours everything; it lays on the gold and silver richly. Insensibly Diana got into spirits again. Surely here were true friends, more cheerful certainly than that solemn and wicked woman

who had so threatened her—her, poor little harmless Diana !

Gradually all the uncomfortable feeling was talked away in a most delightful and vivacious night. Richard exalted himself ; spoke even kindly and generously, as it seemed to Diana, of his old rival. A pity, he said, that Bligh was so morbid. He would never do in the House—a *little* too much of the schoolmaster. They wanted something there of a more rattling sort. He was very indulgent, Richard, and legislatorlike, and could be now above the mists and clouds which overhang the low marshes of disappointment.

Before the night was over, the grave air had passed from Diana. No young girl can resist a gay panorama of the joys of youth thus spread out ; and a not unadroit remark of Richard's that this "terrorism," which "my old friend Bob" and his mamma had wished to set up, had been now abolished, had excellent effect.

Such was the issue of the Calthorpe election, long talked of in the borough. Soon the *Mercury* made two very remarkable announcements : one that Robert Bligh had left Calthorpe for London, "*to make arrangements for presenting a petition*" against the newly-returned member ; and within a week more that "Mr. and Lady Margaret Bowman, with Miss Gay and suite, had proceeded to town, for a lengthened sojourn at their mansion in Portman Square."





## CHAPTER VIII.

### LADY MARGARET "RECEIVES."

**M**ESSRS. LEDBETTER, the eminent Bond Street agents and valuers, had secured for Lady Margaret Bowman (nothing was ever done by, or ordered for, Mr. Bowman) that capital and desirable family mansion on the east side of the well-known square, "suited in every way for a nobleman or a gentleman's family ;"—an elastic capacity that would fit people of almost every degree. It had what the *recherché* "Wally Pepys," a gentleman whom we shall know better presently, called a "hall-chair" in front—one of those spider-legged porches projecting out forward, which yet impart an air of grandeur. It had belonged to the Penguin family, who had fitted it with great magnificence, and then had been unfortunately compelled to fly their country.

Lady Margaret was now established there, and Lady Margaret's servants, tall and powdered, glided about the stairs, hung about the hall, their hands in their plush pockets. Lady Margaret's carriage—a full-bodied vehicle, rich, swaying, and rocking—a good deal *enbonpoint* like some of the dowagers at her ladyship's own parties (we again quote Mr. Pepys)—was always drawn up between two and three o'clock in front of the hall-chair. Enormous horses drew that noble vehicle and its freight daily to the Park, where the great Lady Margaret herself and the

delicate figure beside her—a smiling face of enjoyment, but already trained—were exhibited to the admiring crowd. When that great argosy, with its mariners of fashion was abroad, compelled to stop by reason of having got among shoals and breakers, many graceful spectators on the shore—at the rails—sent them signals of simpering recognition, and many a hat was raised. Lady Margaret's *protégée* was now well known and admired. She was considered charming, as indeed who would not be, who combined such extraordinary advantages—youth, beauty, simplicity, wealth, broad acres, and singleness? Here was a prize for the youths of good address and suitable connections, who indeed presently began to cluster thickly about the noble lady, who performed the duty of being Diana's mamma. She herself too—erst considered rather a good "Mother Hubbard" style of woman, but with nothing to recommend her—found herself of a sudden raised to a high social pinnacle, and treated with respectful homage, an even tender solicitude—such as getting cloaks, taken out to carriage, &c.,—which that good lady, who was no fool, set down to its proper motives. It made no difference to her; she found her account.

A new life, indeed, for our Diana. As we look at our *Morning Plush*—brief and abstract chronicle of the fashionable world—we see their names recurring very often. At "Lady Griggs' *Thé Dansant*" we read were "Lady Margaret Bowman and Miss Gay." In the course of the night crowd up the young men of the period—the young and Hon. Mr. Longtail, Lord Monboddo's eldest; young Cublin, of the Royal Guards; a Sir Charles, only twenty-one, a baronet, M.P., seven thousand a-year, and *no mamma*; Mr. Talboys, the rising statesman, young also, who "had made a speech, my dear, and who, Bowman says, will be Under-Secretary one of these days" (a vast number of promotions are made at *that* undefined period); and also Canning Bowman, who was very assiduous in his attendance.

With such homage, it may be conceived our Diana

began to see life very differently. She very soon picked up the true air, combining it, however, with a little faint rusticity which was very pleasing. Madame Cerise contributed and decked her out richly and sumptuously.

Among the crowd, too, that moved round her was an old friend, Mr. Richard Lugard, M.P., who was living in town, having procured absence from his regiment to attend Parliament, which had just met. There were one or two other petitions of a heavy sort to be disposed of, and much business passing, so the Calthorpe Committee was not yet appointed. Richard spoke contemptuously of it. "He'll fight shy of it at the last minute. It's a shabby, pettifogging business, and like our friend Bob. I met him fairly in open battle, and beat him fairly. I think it so characteristic of him to set the attorneys to work and try and beat me that way."

Often, however, did Diana think of the barrister, whom she had never seen since she left Calthorpe. But she had not time to reflect. She was also often observed about twelve o'clock on a charming horse—not at all like the fatal D'Orsay—cantering along the soft course with the vulgar name—a name indeed worthy of the best Paris slang. This would be after some severe night's work; and by her side was the gentleman who chose the horse, and indeed presented it to her, Mr. Richard Lugard, M.P., grown more handsome, and a little wilder in the eyes. Richard was constantly at Portman Square, and indeed everywhere; for with a young man, otherwise welcome, and under no disability, those two letters are about the best passports that can be conceived. He was indeed married, *mais cela n'empêche pas*. Now, it is no signal for paying-off a ship's company, or retiring into a hospital; rather, it is a fresh enlistment—an entry on a new campaign, with richer and more lavish resources. Mrs. Richard Lugard was down somewhere in the country—no one, indeed, was curious where. Walpole Pepys—"Wally Pepys"—that curious meddling, ever-buzzing fly on society, who resented the slightest merit in another man—even that of coming into a room better than he did—

was soon telling about that Lugard's wife "was an iron woman, born in a forge, under a boiler somewhere. She couldn't be shown in town, my dear fellow; she is all over *rivets*." This poor wit was laughed at immensely by the young ladies, with whom Mr. Pepys was a favourite; but it only excited fresh interest in Richard, an interest not unalloyed with pity, as for a gentleman sacrificed, thrown away, and what not.

His kindness and attention to Diana was soon remarked, and her foolish little head was greatly flattered and delighted by these attentions. With a young married man there is all the security of a chaperon, none of the responsibility of the bachelor.

These were charming times for her: she lived in a whirl; she delighted in everything—the ball, the drive, the dance, the play, the opera. The valse was a new realm, opening slowly and displaying a thousand joys. Many eyes followed that fairy figure as it flew round at Lady Mountattic's rout, at Sir Thomas Longarter's, and many more. With Wally Pepys she was an especial favourite. After many a dinner—and Wally never dined at home—he was over by her side, doing a sort of elderly gallantry, talking some of that unmeaning and dilapidated French, which seems so inferior as a mode of expression to really good English. There are many of these veterans who thus delight in this needless airing of a foreign tongue and think it a token of elegant accomplishment.

Another of these pseudo-linguists who hobbled round Diana's chair, was old Parish, a retired colonel with money, and whom the amiable little lady could not find it in her heart to snub. Perhaps she looked on these old bits of wreck floating about drawing-rooms and ball-rooms, as having but a short time before them, when they would break up and sink to the bottom; or that indeed they were socially under sentence of death, and should have their last few hours of life made easy and comfortable. However that was, these ancient voices, when Diana would draw back her chair, would be heard



uttering, "*Reculer pour sauter mieux*, ha? hey?" or something equally pointless.

We can see Diana better in her new life on a Thursday night, when Lady Margaret Bowman (and Mr. Bowman) has asked some twenty people to a "state-dinner;" and when the drawing-room is filling with a genteel crowd, the door opening every moment to allow some one to shout, and two or three people to enter at full speed, or with a rush, or in a faltering, nervous way, undecided, as it were, whether they should turn and fly. In the half light, very different from the glorious effulgence which will blaze out in a couple of hours hence, we see all the figures and faces, and Diana herself in a matchless robe, with great *aplomb*, acquired in her short training, grown a little fatter, which every one said was just what she wanted, going over at the right moment to take possession of a neglected dowager.

Mr. Bowman has a card concealed in his hand, by which to assort his men and women; for Lady Margaret said she "would not trust Bowman the length of his nose." Yet with this assistance he is near making some sad mistakes. At the last even, he has not assorted all, and is looking a little wildly for some one.

It is a great procession. The Bowmans have always good people: Brindley the Bishop, and Mrs. Brindley; General M'Curdie, of the northern district; Hutton Knatchbull, "the Financial Member," and Director of the Bank of England; Wally Pepys; Captain Hogg; Captain Lugard, M.P.; young Lord Patmore, and a few more rank and file; the "young man of the period," the pawns of dinner-parties, who make a good show on the board. What a glistening, what a rustle as they go down! What alacrity of conversation equals that on the stairs? born clearly of a sudden elation after the long delay, the hope deferred. We may admire the human mind for the gift of what may be called "stair-talk." Some men get afraid; and the youth dragged hurriedly but a second before to a girl whom he never saw, whose arm is forced into his, may be pardoned if he find it a

little difficult to invent what is appropriate to the balusters.

Lady Margaret always looks glistening with pride and triumph as she sees her guests triumphantly seated about her,—her table, her servants, her gold and silver, her state, her meats, her wines. The guests seem to feel no obligation, and disdain any worship.

One of Wally Pepys' "good things," said over a cigar, and which, strange to say, did not offend any one, was this: "Very odd—I never feel the same to a man after I have dined with him." This ungracious philosophy was quite characteristic of Mr. Pepys, yet whose life was indeed one long dinner-party.

Diana had fallen to the bow and spear of the young Lord Patmore, a youth in the Royal Horse Guards, not more than two-and-twenty, endowed with every virtue and generous qualification which in the eyes of a London matron could make him deserving of salvation here, or hereafter. The salvation here was through the saving grace of one of her daughters; that more trifling one of hereafter would follow in due course, and indeed was scarcely her business. A lovely estate, two castles, fifteen thousand a year, a minority that began "seventeen years ago, my dear;" and no female relation in the way; whose control is so necessary for the direction of girls, but so absurd and ridiculous in the instance of males. Could there be conceived a more engaging or gifted specimen of a young man; or one more suited to the pleasing fetters of the married state?

Such a treasure Lady Margaret was not long in marking down for her *protégée*; and though she really intended that her son Canning should have the little prize, still the professional instinct of the matron, and the keener instinct of competition with rival matrons, made her strive hard to secure this young nobleman. Where *partis* find other *partis* at a house, it induces a sense of decent humility; whereas a single *parti*, according to the familiar phrase a "cock of the walk," is apt to become overset, arrogant, and worthless for matronly purposes. Compe-

tion, in a word, is the life, not merely of trade, but of life itself.

Thus it was that Lord Patmore took down our Diana. The diplomatic Canning contrived, however, to have all the benefit of that mysterious prandial connection without its responsibilities, through going down by himself, and in a sort of privateering way getting round to a place near her. The young lord was a very quaint specimen. Had he been in a plebeian marching regiment, he would have furnished diversion to the monotonous idleness of the corps. His glass was always screwed into his eye; and it was certainly unfortunate that so serious a physical defect should so often coexist with a no less embarrassing mental obtuseness. Thus the young lord was always "peering" and stooping forward to see his way with both mind and body; and though he was successful with the latter, he too often failed in the former.

Diana was infinitely amused with him. She had no matronly ideas. The glorious golden gates of Hymen glittered afar off at the top of the mountain; in sight, certainly, but with whole valleys and gardens between. She welcomed all, and never dreamed of "business."

"Did you hear the news?" he said, after a long silence, during which the diplomatic Canning had been chattering on privately to Diana, who had always the greatest respect for his gifts. "A detachment of us are ordered down to Windsor; all of a sudden, you know! You never heard of such excitement. The Duke changed his mind; and at the barracks we never dreamed of it."

At this revelation Diana smiled. She had grown a little out of the old devotion with which she used to receive statements which those who made them thought all-important. It seemed droll. She had had some training, and was beginning to open her pretty eyes to the absurdities in the world around her. The youth admired her a good deal, and was nearly, what his military brethren called in their elegant dialect, "spooney upon her." There was then a pause.

"Are you going to see the new opera—the what's-his-

name—at Covent Garden?" he asked suddenly, as if inspired.

"Oh yes," said Diana, eagerly; "to-morrow night."

"I hope to go too," he said, "only it's so hard to get a place. Docksey offered three guineas for a stall yesterday; he did, indeed."

"And who is Docksey?" Diana asked, not a little amused.

"O Lord! don't you know Docksey? He's captain in our troop. His father allows him two thousand a year; and you never saw such a black charger as he has got. Gave five hundred for him!"

This impressed Diana, as indeed did any statement of great price, size, numbers, &c. Then Mr. Canning Bowman struck in on the other side, and the young Lord Patmore was left to screw his glass into his eye, and peer at any one round the table, as if it had grown dark of a sudden.

How curious, how miscellaneous the chatter on occasions, save for those "left out in the cold," as it were; the men who had come down ignominiously by themselves, and with a loathing for each other. We hear the bishop's mellifluous voice, never at rest; a holy man, gifted with a surprising duality of nature; able to keep a wary eye on the tenderest dishes, and to talk across the table, and carry on an uninterrupted monologue. Clatter, clatter; bursts of laughter down at the end. Now we hear Mr. Manby, a well-known counsel, who is opposite the bishop, and who is very amusing; a mouldy, weak-eyed barrister, who lives in his chambers as in a family, and likes it; but a man who has the odd notion that to be wearing out health, senses, enjoyment, life itself, to become something at sixty-five or seventy, when health, senses, enjoyment, and nearly life itself, are gone, is a foolish thing; which, indeed, it is no doubt discovered to be, about that time, by many then successful, though they do not own it.

"Talking of that," said the bishop, *apropos* of something, "I was at an evening sitting, waiting for that Lord

Dolby, who had something on about his hobby, you know—the marriage-service, which he wants to be altered—when I heard a speech from one of *your* people. Really, quite a sensation it produced; the Chancellor told me, going out, he never heard a more exhaustive argument from so young a man.”

“My dear lord, that was a great case; it involves all the ‘freemen’ question, and may affect many an election.”

“Exactly. Such eloquence, you know—as the Chancellor said, taken by surprise, for he called on him to go on.”

For these things Lady Margaret cared no more than she did for the quadrature of the circle, and perhaps understood them as much; but *quâ* lady of fashion, hostess, &c., she was bound to take official notice. It was astonishing, *curious*. And who was this?

Mr. Manby said it was a rising junior, as sound a fellow as they had—Robert Bligh.

Diana eagerly: “Oh, we know him well! Oh, he is so clever; and always was. Oh, I am so glad! You remember Robert?” she added, turning to Lugard.

“I should think so,” he said, smiling; “he put a good deal of money out of my pocket, and, I must say, out of his own.”

“Oh, yes,” said Mr. Manby; “he fought a very plucky battle down there. But he is sure to do, that man; one of our safest juniors.”

Diana was quite excited by these public commendations, and asked Mr. Manby many eager questions about her friend, to that gentleman’s amusement.

“I know,” he said, “Bligh could have had an Indian judgeship the other day, and a hint was given him to that effect. And his friends told me he was rather dejected,” added Mr. Manby, dropping his voice, “about some love affair, I think. But of course that was absurd; he was more likely to have a hopeless passion for a contingent remainder or an unexpired term. No, he was disgusted at missing his chance at that little borough.”

“I know it,” said Diana, eagerly; “we were there at

the time. It was so exciting : we were all in it. It was so amusing, and I was so sorry for poor Robert Bligh."

"Oh, you were there, Miss Gay?" said the lawyer with an amused look. He saw a spectral witness-box round Diana's chair ; and had he been allowed to cross-examine on the spot, might have extracted some curious admissions. Lugard, half suspicious, and only catching part of what was said, had assumed his scornful look.

Lugard was eager to talk of that subject which is dearest to every man—himself. He was full of a great event that was coming on. He had been longing to begin his career as a Parliamentary combatant. His father, now a little gouty, had written to him testily, "For God's sake, do something, after all the money that has been spent ;" and he had determined to make a bold plunge, not in a modest speech on some subject, but in "a regular motion." He had anxiously thought of a subject ; a little different from the habit of mere practical men who speak because they have a subject ; whereas he was looking for a subject in order that he might speak. This idea had quite possessed him. The difficulty was to procure a *dramatic* one, where there would be a good "part" for Mr. Lugard to play. He had at last found one. He poured it all out to Diana.

"It's the soldiers' wives," he said ; "it is shocking the way they are treated—no comforts, no anything. The soldiers are hindered from choosing good ones, and it's a tax on marriage, you know. I am going to move for a committee to inquire into the whole question."

Diana listened with wonder and reverence. How awful, how wonderful this seemed !

"Yes," he went on ; "you know it comes from me quite properly—a soldier myself, and having lived all my life among soldiers. These poor women ! you can have no idea how they suffer ; the discomforts, the squalor, their wretched children—and we not allowed to recognise them. Oh, it is shocking."

So it seemed to Diana, who was quite touched by this new-born sympathy and humanity in the brave Lugard,

who had really warmed himself up, by dwelling on the condition of these unhappy camp-followers, rehearsing to himself "fine" passages on their state, with which he was to affect the House. Had some of his brethren been present, they would have been infinitely amused, and have "chaffed" him unmercifully; for he had been the one in the regiment who was down on the "dirty sluttish creatures" who dragged after it, or who was in a rage if any of his men dared to form an alliance of the kind. Richard never thought of this, but expounded to Diana how he would deal with the subject, and even recited choice passages to her. It was to come on the next night, and she must come to the ladies' gallery. "I will take you in myself."

Diana was delighted; anything like an expedition was welcome always; and it was presently settled that Mr. Lugard should come and call for them at a dinner-party where they were going on the following evening.

When the ladies were gone up, the subject was renewed. Bligh was of the barrister's own profession, and the subject was interesting to him.

"I assure you," Mr. Manby said, "it was a most remarkable argument. Begbie, who was on the other side, and in every appeal before the House, said he was perfectly astonished. You know we have our conventional and theatrical successes; a young fellow does fairly and the Bench compliments him, but this was another order of business altogether. A veteran could not have done it better."

"Oh, I was struck by it myself," said the bishop, "though I only heard a bit, and I asked the Chancellor, whom I know, and he told me."

"I know him very well," said Lugard, who had listened impatiently; "have known him from a boy. A very laborious working mind, and all that, but genius—Oh, no; dear, no! Industry, yes. I don't want to depreciate him, of course, and I dare say he does his business very well."

"But nowadays, you see," said the barrister, "work *is*

genius. There are so many in the field, and so much false wit, Dutch metal, and all that, and so few able to judge, that we must go back to the original element of value, which is labour."

"Oh, if you do that," said Lugard, with a loud laugh, "better have in Hodge the ploughman, or the paviour out of Fleet Street who works his dozen hours a day."

The barrister answered quietly,

"He is working like a navvy at this petition ; it is only fair to warn you, Mr. Lugard. Sloper leads for him, and he won't take up anything that's not tolerably safe—or is sure to make it safe."

The bishop had risen, growing rather tired "of this sort of thing," and had glided up to what he called paradise. The gentlemen followed in a sort of skirmishing order, hanging behind each other, and very noisy. When they had got upstairs they found that Lady Margaret was receiving. And indeed the dining party soon got "blocked" with the force that was advancing from the hall, scaling the glacis in good order, with neat and shining accoutrements, and excellent discipline. The contrast is strange between the flushed diners who are at the end of their service, and the calm and unruffled fresh soldiers who are hurrying on to the fray.

Yes, Lady Margaret Bowman was "receiving," as such of us as had not the good fortune to know her ladyship might learn from that faithful and accurate chronicle, the *Morning Plush*, in a list of company that must have read agonisingly to the *parvenu*,—those splendid ranks passing before him, a Promised Land into which he durst not enter. This golden river, however, made but a "loop," as it were, at Lady Margaret's house, and after ascending slowly to the high level of the drawing-room, trickled down as slowly and flowed on to various table-lands.

It was surprising all the fine people Lady Margaret got together, and really without difficulty or exertion. A duke, marquises, all the "best" and the right people ; Foosha Pasha even, who seldom went anywhere ; Baron Brenner and Madame Brenner, and that Christine



Brenner of whom Diana had been hearing so much. The curious thing that surprised her not a little was the slight intimacy that, after all, appeared to exist between that foreign family and the diplomatist ; which seemed a little strange after the rose-coloured picture of Lady Margaret, the exuberant intimacy, that "running in and out fifty times in the day," which seemed to go on always. On the contrary, Diana saw Mr. Canning approach a short little wiry man—dry as one of the queer esculents called "locusts"—who wore glasses, with evident trepidation and obsequiousness, by whom he was received with a polite but distant smile. To that Christine, whose slave he was, or who was reported by Lady Margaret as being *his* slave—a tall, full-faced, fair-haired, German-looking girl, who indeed scarcely seemed the daughter of the wiry little man—he was even more obsequious, that young lady receiving him with curt, off-hand manner, being busily engaged with the handsome Colonel Goodfellow, Lord Bunham's brother, in the Guards, on the staff, Victoria-crossed, Legion-of-honoured, hung all over with labels and ribbons, as Wally Pepys said, "like a prize-ox at a show."

Diana's spirits always rose on these nights. She was delighted with anything like a procession or a raree-show, with the flitting colours, the dazzling lights, the pleasant voices. If you looked at her across the room, she would smile at you from mere enjoyment. Here was Lord Patmore again beside her, "taking her up and down," whispering his *fadaises*,—"that goose Patmore," as various gentlemen rather pettishly described him.

This young nobleman's admiration was indeed getting rather marked, though he could not find any way of showing it. His stock of reserved and delicate compliments failing him very soon, her dress was a happy resource ; and with an earnest and marked air he repeated the same praises very often.

The one who said "that goose Patmore" oftenest was Richard Lugard, who was very scornful to his friends.

"Just look at that donkey," he said ; "the way he

sticks to that poor girl! She can't get rid of him. I wonder who he got to trim his ears close? It's most unfair to a young creature like that, in her own house—not able to attend to her guests or *amuse* herself without a public idiot going with her like her shadow. I shut him up at dinner, and you never saw any one so scared as he was."

We should also have heard other gentlemen speaking of Mr. Lugard. "Ill-conditioned fellow; overbearing; wants taking down a peg. Always bragging about the House and his rubbishy little M.P.-ship. The best of the joke is, they say, there's a petition against him, and that he hasn't a chance; and how will he look then?"

Such is the world; so everybody "tears" everybody. But the comfort is, that with all this scandal little harm is done; these are the "bills" with which the pleasant credit of society is kept floating, and luckily no one requires them to be taken up. So that evening finished, and we read the whole list the next morning. It seemed to glitter like a harlequin's suit in the light. Lady Margaret would receive again the following week.

Indeed, Diana's life was now a busy one, for on the following night she was abroad again, and also on almost every evening of the week. She had fallen into the round of what is called pleasure, but which indeed has its fatigues and monotony. A young lady in the season goes through a discipline severer and more useful than would be imagined. That drill and drudgery of fashion quite fills in her time, and causes a strict economy of every moment to get through the work. What with the invitations to give and to answer, the visits to pay and to receive, the rides to take, the drives to make—necessary, indeed, to freshen up the delicate soldier for the long night's work before her—the concerts, the operas, the drums, the balls, the dinners at home, the dinners abroad, the choosing of dresses at Madame Cerise's, the pictures, the hundred and one things to be got through,—this was a very busy time for Diana. Not that she was without assistance; and the business mind of Lady Margaret did much in the way of organisation. But under the process,

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our Diana's little soul was growing steady, calmer, more self-reliant and independent. She began to know, to feel her responsibilities, and to have that fitting sense of her own importance as a young and pretty heiress, and the duties and bearing which such a character involved.

Thus it was that on the following evening, at eight o'clock, Lady Margaret's great Indiaman of a coach stood at the door, closed on this occasion, and rocking heavily with every motion of the great horses, to take the three away to the routine dinner. Indeed, the party dined at home about twice in the week, and we may be sure that the "auditing" of the invitation accounts—the "keeping the books," as it might be called—was a very serious and troublesome business. Lady Margaret, who had indeed the soul of a general, the promptness of a Wellington, settled the thing in a second. As the invitations were opened :

"Lady Pender again ! What on earth is the woman at ? Third time we have refused them. Nothing but mouldy married barristers all round you."

Or it might be—"Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Malcolm request the honour," &c.

"Oh, we must go to them—charming things ; a little bit of a house, pet, and five hundred a year ; but just a dozen of the nicest people you could pick out. Everything in best style. Write, dear, at once."

"But we are engaged that day—"

"To old Sir Richard, one of his fozzle parties, an old friend of Bowman's. I'll send to him this evening at the club, and tell him it was a mistake."

Diana was not at all shocked at this little bit of morality. She believed Lady Margaret knew all about these things so much better than *she* did ; and these things are dwelt on here, perhaps, more minutely than they deserve, with a view of illustrating this young lady's character, and showing the very natural change which was taking place in her nature.

Away rolled the heavy argosy—a good solid casket for the rich and delicate little piece of jewellery within.

It stopped at "The Fanshaves" (Major-General),

people whom Lady Margaret did not care much for, but she had ascertained that young Lord Patmore was to be there. Indeed, she had found that little or nothing could be done for Canning, that gentleman having diplomatic tact enough to see that he was not, as it is called, making way with the young lady. And Diana herself, when Lady Margaret's hints had at last grown unmistakable, all but told her, with pleasant frankness, that she considered Mr. Canning as her brother or father. So Lady Margaret determined to leave all to that wonderful necromancer—time. In the meanwhile she found her account in this patronage of the young girl; as what elderly lady fond of position and of gaiety, without daughters of her own, does not? A sensible person, not foolish enough to think the homage is directed to herself, she improves the shining hour, takes everything as it comes, and enjoys the various fashionable blessings thrown in her way. Indeed, there seems nothing more pleasant than an office of this sort, which is more agreeable than the weary responsibility of the mamma. The mamma is unavoidable, she cannot help herself; but the patroness is the object of innumerable little attentions, a delicate and kindly consideration, of a wrapping-up that is almost tender on the part of the young cavaliers of her train. And while Diana was taken down to the carriage and wrapped in her gipsy cloak by one young spark of position and quality, another was no less kindly enshawling the greater proportions of Lady Margaret—a business of more difficulty, and taking longer time. A third was gone to see about the carriage; and when all was ready, and the great vehicle was moored alongside, then emerged the procession. Lady Margaret, wrapped close, assisted down the steps by two obsequious youths, guiding her steps with "lean on me, Lady Margaret;" Diana coming behind with a whole cohort about her. It might be raining, but the politeness of these young Adonises was proof against that. Your true gentleman, in the service of the *belle dame*—when does he care for rain, wind, or even sleet?



## CHAPTER IX.

### A ROUND OF GAETIES.

**T**HERE then was the Fanshawes' house, a modest mansion in a rather shabby street, where the great carriage came rolling up, and its horses were checked suddenly with a plunge, a banging of steps let down, and the two ladies had passed into the house between a lane of passers-by, Mr. Bowman following as though he were a little ashamed of himself. The company here again was of the usual pattern, but what Lady Margaret called "nice"—a Mrs. Childers, who "led," Lady Mary Vivian, and the duke her father, whom she had often wished to know; some "nice" young men, young Lord Patmore, a distinguished colonel of good family, and some more. When the new-comers were settled, and the young lord had "poked and peered" his way over to Diana, and had begun conversation with the remark, "I saw you to-day in Regent Street; I was at the door of my bootmaker's," a gentleman, a good deal in shadow, and who had been talking to another gentleman, stooped down, and said gravely,

"How do you do, Miss Gay?"

Diana half started from her seat with delight.

"What! Oh, Robert, I am so glad! Where *have* you been?"

He answered in the same grave way,

"Here in town, in the old chambers."

"But you have never come to us, though we have asked you again and again. We thought it so unkind."

"I am really so busy now," he said; "besides, I have *given up all that sort of thing.*"

Now came dinner. The General, an old man with a young wife, knew how to "assort his company;" and though the young Lord Patmore had, by the inflexible law, taken down Mrs. Fanshawe, that lady had discovered in herself an overpowering affection for Diana, who must sit near her; and having brought her and the young lord into conjunction, at once abandoned that nobleman, and devoted herself to a gentleman on the other side, who was another lady's property.

Taking a glance round her, Diana saw that Robert Bligh was beside a young lady whose face was familiar to her, whom she had seen during the election days walking about Calthorpe. She remembered Miss Buller. Mrs. Fanshawe had also judiciously cast this pair together. To her, as Diana noticed, Robert was earnestly telling his story. His eyes scarcely ever turned to her. She knew him well enough to be sure that he would not take the trouble of acting, and sometimes when his eyes met hers, she saw that it was with a placid indifference. The well-trained Robert, so practical in all things, had no doubt carried out strictly what he had told her he would do, and had succeeded in so doing. The old fires had gone out for ever. When the lovers in dramas and romances passionately protest that "they have torn her image from their heart" with a demeanour and protestation that seem like insanity, no one knows so well as the image herself that nothing of the kind has been done, and that, on the contrary, the image has been more deeply rooted than ever. It is the indifference quite removed from resentment that brings conviction of the most fatal sort. Diana was deeply pained at this, perhaps from a little pride, to say nothing of other feelings. But at present the noble lord found his account in this change, and to his surprise discovered that his sallies were being received

with a zest and devotion really unusual. Compliments even repaid his exertions, and the young lord, who had always a half-suspicion that Diana was laughing at him, now, on that night, came to the resolution that he would no longer delay in bringing matters to a crisis.

By-and-by Bligh began to speak, not for his neighbour, but for the company, and Diana wondered at the new pleasantry and sense which came from his lips. He "led" the conversation; he had got rid of the "old Bligh" indeed, and had turned into a man of the world. Diana was amazed. The retiring manner was all gone. He was of the world, worldly, and could talk fashion and frivolity with an airy grace.

When the dinner was over, and "the gentlemen had come up," he went over to Diana and spoke to her kindly and easily. He was so glad to hear she was quite taking a leading part in the pleasant world. He saw her name in the *Morning Plush* regularly. He admired the wisdom of Lady Margaret, he said, who he always thought had good sense.

"If we do live in the world at all, why, it is as well to follow the stream. And how is my friend, or enemy, Richard Lugard?"

Diana was greatly piqued at his tone, even hurt. Still, she made an advance, and said again,

"You have never called on us—never have come to see us."

"Oh, you know I am so busy," said Bligh, gravely. "I just get out now and again to a dinner, in this sort of way. It helps one on, too, so much, which is the *great aim*. But I certainly shall—. I suppose I sha'n't meet Lugard, who was never in the best temper towards me, and I fear won't be in a week or two."

"Why?"

"Oh, this election petition; they tell me he *must* go. But it doesn't do to reckon on anything too surely. I myself thought I was quite secure of winning, and if I was a betting person, would have laid twenty to one."

"Indeed, indeed, I often wished to speak to you about

that, and tell you how grieved I was, how bitterly I have regretted what I did ; for I know it seemed unkind."

"My dear Miss Gay, unkind ! No, nothing of the sort ; and do you suppose I think so ? Pray don't. I own, in the annoyance of disappointment, I did speak a little excitedly, and I often thought of coming to you to explain that. But the idea that you should have had a moment's uneasiness, or even thought, about *that* ! No, you must think that if things turn out fairly, all will be the better for me in the end, because I shall be established without lying under any very heavy obligation to any one."

Diana did not answer for a moment, then said abruptly, "How is Mrs. Bligh ?"

"She is away in France—at Boulogne ; she has been there some weeks. By the way," added Bligh, his manner suddenly changing, "I want to give you a little hint—advice even. May I ? It is for your good, recollect."

"Do anything," said Diana, warmly.

"I fear," he went on, "that my mother has taken a dislike, a prejudice, at least—against you. It is very excusable in *her*. She thinks I am the finest and cleverest of men. There are plenty of such delusions in the world ; they are very pardonable. But still I fear that this idea has taken hold of her mind ; so you must not mind if you should hear that she has not spoken kindly of you."

"Yes," said Diana, timorously, "I know it ; and she told me as much. But," added she, with dignity, "Mrs. Bligh cannot harm me, I think."

"I am sure she would harm no one," he said ; "and not you, certainly. By the way, about Lugard. I am told he is to make a motion in the House ; at least, he has been telling it to every one."

"Oh, yes !" said Diana. "And, by the way, I had forgotten—he is to call for us."

But just at that moment a servant entered and whispered Lady Margaret, who rose to go with infinite regret and sorrow.

"Di, dear," she said later, "between you and me, I was not at all sorry to get off. I think their parties are



going off a little. Well, dear, how did Patmore do to-night?"

Lugard was below, not a little excited. The great, awful, and sepulchral carriage, with its lamps flashing, was drawn up. Again it swung and rocked as the ladies ascended. The gigantic footman stood mute-like at the door, then shut up his steps, and closed his door with a hollow thud, which it was scarcely fanciful to liken to the falling of clods of earth on the coffin. No wonder Diana said that she reposed more on the cushions of that luxurious vehicle than on her other bed at home.

Richard was in a perfect flutter. He spoke little as they went along.

"Why did you not bring Kitty?" asked Diana, suddenly. "She would have so liked it."

"Not she," said Richard, bluntly; "she takes little interest in what concerns me."

"Oh, Richard, indeed she does! I know it."

"Well, I mean," he added hastily, "she would sooner be at home over the fire. What does she care about my speeching! My goodness, it is getting very nervous, and it seems as if it was all going out of my head. Here we are."

There they were at Westminster Hall, with the crowds hurrying in, the lamps blazing. Diana took his arm, and with a fluttering heart, as though she was going to speak herself, followed him up to the gallery. Then came the glittering chamber, the great arena below, with the flitting figures, the tranquil solemnity, the dreamy air, the buzz of voices, and the little figure under the shadow of the gallery, who with a faint wiry voice seemed to be speaking, but to whom no one was attending. It seemed awful, a majestic spectacle to Diana—so grand, so imposing. Now she saw where was the dignity, the wisdom that made England so great. How grand, how noble it must be "to be in the House of Commons!" Lugard was infinitely pleased with this unconcealed admiration. Lady Margaret, not very comfortable in her seat, and already a little tired, saw only "a lot of men, my dear,"

whom, had their lot been at all cast in relation to her, she could have dealt with in the same practical way she did with her Bowman.

Lugard pointed out to Diana the various notable chiefs. "You see that old gentleman with the wiry whiskers and his arms folded?"

Diana knew *him* perfectly, and was delighted at seeing the veteran leader, whom she had often noticed riding a steady animal. In these days the old and skilful warrior was still alive, in the flush of his popularity—the prophet of the "let-well-alone" system and "after-me-the-deluge" policy—one of the most comfortable and convenient for the professor himself.

Lugard, too, showed her others of no less note, and certainly less personal in their views; a cold, classical face, close in text, sharp, Roman almost in outline, with much scorn about the mouth, an interrogative eye, and a restless manner—a figure, however, that was never very popular in the ladies' gallery, as being too bloodless, with too much of the "dry bones" about him. They always turned with far more interest to what young Hartley called the "incorruptible sea-green," the strange figure of mystery, who sat impassive, in a torpor, like a great snake coiled up, but about whom there was a fascination almost as of warm blood, and a promise of secret power which would display itself presently. In this creature there was more of the man; and when he spoke, there came life, and a wicked sarcasm, and an innocent manner, and this with a pleasant air of middle-aged dandyism—the eye-glass, the curls, the colours about his clothes, which were so many links between him and a drawing-room.

But there was the tall, half-stooped figure, with the swinging arms, the large bright face, the lurking humour about the mouth, the sly glance of fun in the eye, with the amazing fluency, the joke—now free and easy, now sarcastic, and now, as it were, stripping off the gauzes and light trappings of jesting, gets into buff and harness, becomes sober, weighty, impressive, splendidly oratorical, vehement, massive, and overpowering. There is an in-

terest about *him* in the ladies' gallery, as they know there how his name has become identified with an injured one of their own order ; and they hang on his lips.

Then they listen to that stout, burly, rotund gentleman, who, in fine round voice raised a little into a chaunt, pours out weighty sentences, and denounces in good English—scarcely eloquent, but sonorous and fluent—the monopolies of the rich and powerful. He is a little uninteresting.

Suddenly there comes a lull—a motion has been withdrawn, the debate has collapsed, and Lugard, turning a little pale, hurriedly goes away.

Diana sees him enter, looking quite a little figure—hears other motions called—hears other little figures pop up and sit down with excuse or withdrawal—and finally, and with great nervousness, hears a faint voice below her, and perceives that Lugard is beginning to move his motion.

“Oh, Lady Margaret, listen—listen—it's Richard !” she cried out, not a little to the amusement of some great political ladies near her.

Richard was considered to do it “very fairly.” A number of his friends put in “hear, hear,” at encouraging moments, which he was too agitated not to think were the signal of universal approbation.

Diana was not a little indignant to see the Roman-looking gentleman talking over his shoulder to his friends, afterwards writing a letter, and then, in one of Dick's “best bits,” get up suddenly and, putting on a broad-leaved hat, hurry out as if he had an appointment. The wiry-whiskered was asleep, his hat well down over his eyes. The sea-green had an air of insensibility, too ; but somehow Diana had a conviction he was not asleep, but was pretending to be insensible. He had the air that he would suddenly uncoil, and startle every one with a spring. A low hum was going on, like a *taum-taum* accompaniment ; people darted across, flew back again, sat down beside others, and pulled papers out of their breast-pockets to show. The class with whom Diana was most

scornfully indignant was that of various good-looking young men with beards, who would come up into the galleries, running round, as Diana thought, to secure a better 'vantage-point for listening to her friend ; but who, as it turned out, would choose a retired sofa, and lying down at full length, would go off into balmy slumbers.

Richard really did his work very fairly indeed, with a spirit and dash which carried off a good many shortcomings. He set the case of the soldiers' wives in the best view ; he did all he could for them. Did those ladies read, they would be amazed at the tender feelings with which their patron regarded them ; and whose behaviour, as already said, might have led them to suppose he was not a little hostilely inclined to them. He dwelt on their hardships—"on their little children." He told stories "drawn from his own experience," he said modestly, though not with strict truth, but what he had picked up from the intelligent sergeants of his corps.

He presently saw, to his great delight, that the Right Hon. Harding Hanaper, Under-Secretary-at-War—or *for* war—was busy taking notes. At that moment, as he told Diana, "he knew he had the House with him. The fellow was going to tackle my facts." In short, we might borrow the description of one of the clever gentlemen of the gallery, who furnished to an illustrated weekly journal what were called "Thumbnail Sketches in the House," in one of which Richard was thus "etched":—

"But soft ! there is a sudden lull ; the Speaker's clear voice is heard. Mr. Magruder's motion for the Disinfection of Towns has gone off. What next ? The Clerk gives out the orders of the day. Something about soldiers' wives—Heaven help them !—and a young man, good-looking, yet modest withal, in clear voice begins. The cry is 'New member !' This, reader, is Captain Richard Lugard, of Her Majesty's land forces, member for Calthorpe ; and a very promising young fellow he is. He is listened to with marked attention ; and a strange case he does make out. Those poor drudges—recognised, yet not known—whom the hooting War Office *owls* pretend

not to see, yet whom they peck and claw and tear over all the same.

‘ Lay her out tenderly,  
Home she has none,’

save on the rude timbers of the baggage-cart. As he went on, he warmed with the subject, and was heartily cheered. A young man of mark and mettle, and that will be heard of again—of ripe abilities, that may, with judicious training, land him in the seat of the right hon. gentleman who now administers the War Office with such skill.”

He sat down flushed and triumphant, moving for a committee. The Right Hon. Harding Hanaper then rose, and in a dry, thin voice, was understood not so much to oppose it, which it seemed too much trouble to do, but to throw cold water on the matter, in the usual way. It was not opportune. The whole matter would presently be reopened. There was the commission on barrack accommodation, of which a noble member of the other House had given notice. He thought it would appear to this House quite undesirable to go into the matter now; and he was *afraid* he *could not give* his consent to the proposal of the hon. member.

Then Mr. Hanaper sat down, crossed the House to speak to another member who had papers to show him dealing with quite a different matter. Captain Lugard, greatly excited by some private compliments that had been paid him, was prepared to divide the House; but Bodnam, the “manager” of their party, came to him mysteriously, and whispering, “Well done! and a great success!” advised him (behind the back of his hand) to yield: “The House is quite with you; you have gained your point virtually: so better leave it, as Hanaper says. It’s a great concession for him.”

Richard was persuaded. A military friend told him “he’d have been nowhere if he’d gone on, and not got five men to walk out of the House with him. He flew up to the ladies’ gallery. Lady Margaret was very weary indeed. The seats were “dreadful, my dear—not fit for

Christian ladies." But Diana was delighted. She was furious with the dry schoolmaster of a creature who had dared to oppose her friend. As it seemed to her, a splendid victory had been gained. The fort had been carried by assault.

"It was *virtually* a defeat for *them*," he said, repeating Mr. Bodnam's formula. "The House was with me from the first."

Diana saw in him already a splendid legislator—a minister, sitting, as was the coiled leader, impassive, with his hat down on his eyes.

"I will come and ask you for places," she said.

"And I shall not refuse you one, whatever it be," he said with *effusion*.

Alas, poor Dick! the handwriting was already on the wall. Within two days the committee to try the Calthorpe election was struck.

Next morning he and Diana also flew to the papers to read the speech. The mean, jealous creatures, who had no humanity for the poor soldiers' wives, had set down something of this sort:

#### "THE CONDITION OF SOLDIERS' WIVES.

"Captain Lugard moved for a committee to inquire into the condition of the wives of privates and non-commissions. He said their status was unsatisfactory, as being virtually ignored by the authorities, who were yet obliged to recognise them unofficially. He dwelt on the anomaly of this state of things, and mentioned several instances of hardship. He trusted the House would take the matter into consideration.

"Mr. Hanaper opposed the motion, on the ground that the whole subject would be considered under the Army Accommodation Bill, of which notice had been given in the other House.

"The motion was then withdrawn."

After this triumph, Lugard had indeed the usual hope that Bligh would not go on—at the last moment he'd

think better of it. To Diana he would come often, explaining his hopes and vexation of this.

"He does it on purpose to worry and harass me; it's a very poor and unworthy satisfaction. I suppose he can't contain himself at the spectacle of my little success, and thinks that this will be the best way to show his spite. What can be the use? He *knows* he can't win; it's a hopeless game. They tell me the House is always with any one that seems to make a hit—they don't like losing him; and it *has* an influence on the committee. Why should he throw away his money and mine? If he had some real friend who would set all this before him! It was for Bligh's own sake he said this. Of course it would not suit my dignity, you know; and it's no affair of mine."

"I tell you, Richard," Diana said, seized with a brilliant idea, "leave it to *me*. I met him the other evening at dinner, and I'll just write him a little note to tell him to come here. I *think* I have some little influence over him, though indeed"—and Diana recalled his manner—"he was very *cold* to me."

"Just like him," said Lugard; "he'd like to punish you as well as me. But with all that, you could turn him round your finger, if you *chose* to do it, Miss Diana."

Diana knew the utter ungovernableness of those little muscles about her pretty mouth, and what a business it was to look grave. She could only weigh an opinion, or speak, when she was alone, and bent her mind to it seriously, which was a dreadful business. At all events, a compliment of this kind always made her smile.

When Lugard had gone she put in execution her plan, which was to write a charming little letter to Robert Bligh. Indeed, she yearned to make up with that hero. He had been very indifferent to her, which was the same as being unkind. After all, as Richard Lugard had said again and again with great force, what had she done to him? Now that it was all past and gone, they must make it up.

"Portman Square.

"DEAR ROBERT," she wrote, "I *want* you to come

and see me, *most particularly*. I want to talk over something *very privately* and confidentially, and Lady Margaret is gone out. Poor Richard is very uneasy and unhappy, and thinks you have a *spite* to him, which I assured him you had not. Oh, how I wish you two were friends ! I have set my heart on it. And he thinks—but I told him he was unjust in *that*—that you are trying to put him out of his seat, merely to punish him. Every one is talking of his speech, and says he will be so successful *there*. And he has set his heart on *redeeming all*, as he calls it, by this new life. I know it is very hard for you, who have had so *much expense and trouble* ; but he says he is quite *secure*, and that it is *such* a pity you should waste your hard-earned money in such a thing. I know nothing about these things, but I thought I would write you a *little* note about it. For I assure you I feel very much the way you have given me up—you, who I thought was *such* a friend, and who *was* a friend in the old, old happy days. Forgive me, dear Robert, and believe me yours always,

“ DIANA GAY.”

That night she got a prompt answer :—

“ Chambers.

“ MY DEAR MISS GAY,—I am so grieved you should think me neglectful. But I am very busy indeed. As I told you down at Calthorpe, I was then really neglecting business. Now I am gone back to school, and have hardly a moment. When you *really* want me for advice or assistance, you may be sure I shall sacrifice every other thing to attend to your interests. I often *do* think of those old, old happy days—more indeed than you would credit. But they are *old* days, and belong to the past ; and therefore it is a very harmless pleasure. As for Lugard, the thing is beyond recall. It *must* go on now. It does not rest with me at all ; for if I withdrew, there are the electors to be considered. As for Lugard himself, I have no feeling of any kind against him. I wish him well, but I think you will admit he was never so kindly disposed to me as to warrant my making a sacrifice of that sort. It would be quite Quixotic ; and he will



understand it so himself. You see I have gone back to the world again, and have become its obedient, humble servant, and am driven to get what I can out of it. I have not found it so 'hollow' hitherto as it has been painted. There is nothing very genial or overflowing ; but it is fair. Forgive me for not being able to comply with your wishes. Very likely I shall be punished by defeat, and then you will say I richly deserve it.—Yours sincerely,

“ROBERT BLIGH.”

Diana was very grave as she read.

“My dear child, don't pucker your little forehead that way,” said Lady Margaret, “with that horrid paper.”

It left a great impression on her, and she was very silent. There was an under-current of earnestness in Robert's letter ; and for the first time she saw clearly that what she had done was more important than she had supposed—was more *ugly*, even more serious. She began to think of herself as cruel and ungenerous.

“I hope to Heaven,” said Richard, impetuously, when he heard of this result, “he didn't think I had anything to do with it ! If I was starving, I wouldn't ask him for a penny. My goodness ! he will go about saying that I wanted him to compromise. Yes, he will ; I know him well. It's just what he would do.”





## CHAPTER X.

### THE PETITION.

**T**HE long galleries that stretch down by the committee-rooms of the House of Commons, and which are indeed vast ante-rooms, were filled with loungers and talkers, with men rushing backwards and forwards. There is perhaps more business there, and more depending on that business, than anywhere else in the world. A paradise, too, for lawyers and barristers. In their own hierarchy, they there rise many steps,—there is no great power, like judges, to control them or to require homage. How precious everything becomes once that portal is crossed: time, talent, name — everything except the suitor's money, which comes showering heavily into the laps of these legal Danæes.

At this period there were many petitions "on," and many committees sitting. Every little door that opened and shut down that endless series opened and shut on a terrible game of hazard going on within, on which many, many thousands were staked—a game indeed where there was inattention, sometimes sleep, oftener absence, oftener still stupidity, on the part of the croupiers who dealt. The only chances were in clever "cogging"—adroit management on the part of the players.

One of these rooms was labelled "Calthorpe Election

R

Committee ;" and outside it was a busy group—witnesses, attorneys, and a barrister or two. Richard Lugard, the sitting member, was very confident ; sometimes he grew a little nervous, and frequently much fretted and provoked, by being harassed in this way. So amazing, too, after all his success, and with so many talking of it and congratulating him.

Here now it was beginning ; and Begbie, Bligh's counsel, was "stating his case to the committee." That committee was composed of Sir Wellbore Craven (chairman), Mr. Slater, Mr. Robins Gore, Mr. Bond, and Mr. W. C. M'Culloch, who were behind a horse-shoe fence. From behind that fence they looked out at a strange raffish crowd—the Calthorpians brought up from their district four days before (Sir Wellbore had been ill), and maintained at frightful cost in town. There was Page, Mr. Lugard's London solicitor, who found him money when he wanted it, and his Calthorpe solicitor, and his Calthorpe voters. And there were Bligh's solicitors and his voters, and, as we have said, Begbie, Q.C., stating his case. Begbie was a dry, thin-voiced little man, but who was known to be exquisitely artful. He was in a great deal of business, but generally contrived to give apparently a deal of time to each case. With him were others,—Sloper, an admirable junior—Oliver, who was spoken of as "rising," "promising," "safe," and who was "getting into leading business." The old committee-chairman always used to say when the leader had "to fly," and an apology was made by the junior for taking the matter up, "The case will suffer nothing in your hands, Mr. Oliver ; we always hear you with pleasure and instruction."

Mr. Lugard had not been so fortunate. By desperate exertion they had got hold of Legge, Q.C., who was wholly in parliamentary practice, and really spent his time and professional service in flying down the corridor from one room to another, his gown spread like a mainsail, and clerks hanging on to the rigging. By the aid of such "main-sheets" he was dragged into a hot and steaming room, packed with his fellow-creatures -- all

whose faces were turned on *him* to hear what he would say to get them out of the knot they were waiting for him to untie ; a knot requiring teeth and nails to open at any time, but which he must pick open *impromptu*, as it were, or make a pretence of opening : an eager mouth being at each ear pouring in various recipes. Sometimes the point has "gone off," or been solved, during the absence of the agitated express ; and when the great deliverer arrives it is over. Then his face grows *distrain*—he whispers, he takes a note, but he is out of his element. He can do nothing except under high pressure. He is looking to the door ; and in a moment a wild attorney is tearing in—rushing, tumbling over every one. Legge, to his relief, knows he is wanted. Behind the back of his hand he tells the panic-struck junior to "get out" something, and "press him on the mesne rates,"—then spreads the mainsail ; and he is away before the gale to the room where the Gas Question is being brought out. Lugard sees with infinite impatience that he is not there, and that he will not hear a syllable of Begbie's damaging speech, which trails on for three quarters of an hour, and at last concludes. It is scandalous ; and yet "that fellow" has been retained at some frightful sum, and will have to be "refreshed" on a scale which it is only etiquette should correspond to the magnitude of the retainer.

Here are the witnesses being examined by Sloper ; and certainly Lugard nows begins to be amazed and frightened by some of their revelations. Why was this concealed from him ? There could be no mistaking the stolid faces of the corrupt Calthorpe voters, their provincial dialect, and their confession candidly made "how Mr. — had come to their wives, when they themselves were out, and had promised this and that ; and with a smiling, pleasant face Mr. — had shown the greatest interest in the family and the children ;" and *when* he had gone away, the strange and amazing phenomenon was discovered of a bank-note for fifty pounds being discovered on the chimneypiece. The cross-examination of this witness by

Legge was admirable. "Was it such a wonderful sight? Had he never seen such a natural curiosity as a fifty-pound bank-note?"—a supposition that was indignantly rejected.

Sometimes the two leaders got into a quarrel, and seemed to regard the efforts of the chairman to compose their differences with contempt; Lugard hovering about, bursting out into the gallery for air, scarcely able to contain himself, as some new witness came up. "They've paid those fellows themselves," he said; "it's a conspiracy." Bligh did not appear. "He pretends to be indifferent—it's not worth his while." But Bligh was really busy; engaged in a heavy case which he could not leave.

Begbie, Q.C., "that little wasp," as some of his brethren called him, made a most characteristic and damaging speech, which turned Lugard pale. But towards the end of the day his own counsel had *his* turn, and with masterly skill "showed up" the "conspiracy," as he persisted in calling it. He "shattered" the case of the other side—pounding it into fragments, as with blows of a sledge-hammer. Lugard's spirits rose with every change: his eager face, now exhibiting triumph, now scorn, emphasised every turn of the speaker. What provoked him was the behaviour of the members of the committee. One was writing letters, one was reading letters; a third would get up to go out, and had been away now nearly half an hour. Sometimes there was whispering and "jokes." It was *scandalous*, he thought—such interests being at stake.

At last, however, the evidence, speeches, all came to an end, and the order was given to clear the room. The committee were to consider their decision. Lugard, flushed, excited, half-frantic, hung about the corridor, talked to his solicitor, could scarcely, as he said, "keep his soul in his body," waiting to hear the verdict.



## CHAPTER XI.

### A PROPOSAL.

**A**GAIN we return to the little heroine of this story—to her happy days and pleasant nights, as she carried on this fashionable and seductive campaign. With her youth and spirits—though she was not robust—it was not so difficult: and there is many a frail, and perhaps consumptive, factory-girl who goes through double the work, has less sleep, and less food. But for Lady Margaret it was more wonderful. *Her* secret was having no anxieties; she had no daughters to “put out;” she was not “gaming,” so to speak—playing desperately high stakes, for a few seasons, in the hope of the matrimonial dice turning up sixes for her and hers. She was full of the agreeable juices of nature: if she dined out, she dined well, and enjoyed the meal; if she went to the ball, there were the young men—their own little legion—who were more affectionately solicitous about her supper than if they had been her sons. Indeed she found “going out” very pleasant; and as she knew that she would have Diana but a short time under her care, she had already pitched on another young lady, equally friendless, and nearly equally desirable in every way, with whom she designed to *remplacer* her present client. So have noble ladies looked out, we are told, for a suitable orphan to adopt.

Hers was a very sensible mind, and, for a woman of fashion, full of fair principles and inclined to fair dealing. As we have mentioned, she had long since seen and candidly owned to herself "that nothing was to be done with Canning." Diana, indeed, as we have said, had all but told her what her private feelings were to that gentleman.

Next to winning a battle for herself, the true *entrepreneuse* in these matters loves the glory of victory for *itself*. There is great glory in clambering up the breach and carrying off the coronet. Such success wins reputation, if not substantial personal profit. With this view, from the very beginning she had marked young Lord Patmore, and had even fixed a time for the escalade. That noble youth was indeed in a sad way. He dearly adored Diana; and he would have liked nothing better than to have gone on in this delightful elysium—as who would not?—for years. He would have liked, too, to have laid his coronet at her feet, according to the old-fashioned phrase; for so engaging, so charming a young creature he thought he had never seen yet. But then he was afraid of "making a fool of himself;" and there were familiars in the regiment, and especially Major Bellamy, whose knowledge of the world and sarcastic good commonsense remarks he quite dreaded.

Major Bellamy was very severe on him, and at balls and such places always "had his eye on him."

"Why, Pat," he would say, "you are as fresh and green as a new oyster off the beds! You should have a nurse after you, and a go-cart."

"Pat" would screw his glass into his eye, and foolishly ask, "Wh—why so?"

"Because the whole town sees it; because you are regularly caught by that girl and her scheming chaperone."

"No, I'm not; nothing of the kind."

"They give it out, then. They know who they are dealing with, my friend. Why, usedn't you to tell us, child, when you first came, you were fifteenth baron, and had fifty years' minority, and could pick and choose where you liked?"

"Well, and it's the truth ; you know it is—now."

"I know it is ! D'ye hear Pat talking like a Solomon ! Why the whole town is looking at you ; and after being put into the *Cuckoo*—"

On this allusion Patmore turned very red indeed. The *Cuckoo* was the new paper supposed to be maintained by witty gentlemen in the public offices, who furnished fun, and jokes, and private information merely as an amusement. So far "it had paid" very well ; but the novelty was wearing off, and the information about naming marriages, political changes, &c., growing very meagre indeed ; so much so that they were driven to speculation, and less reliable sources of information.

It was a fact that some such notice of Patmore's coming alliance was actually figuring in the current number of the week. He was at once shown—on the first page, under a little sketch of a cuckoo dressed for a ball, with an opera-glass and crush hat—an announcement that brought the colour to his cheeks :—

"We are authorised to announce that Lord Bagnio will be the new Steward of the Household.

"Sir John Chaunter has resigned the Mastership of the Furzeby Hounds.

"A marriage is arranged between Viscount Patmore and Miss Diana Gay, of Gay Court."

The fright, the annoyance of the noble youth was incredible. For the first time in his life he seemed to know what trouble and anxiety were. Worse again was "the persecution" he had to endure, everybody "bothering" and congratulating fifty times in the day. Worse again was the affected compassion of his older friends and brethren, who said, "Poor Pat ! I warned you, recollect."

One would have thought that a young girl, pretty and engaging, with so handsome a fortune, would have suited this young gentleman. But he had really come to think that the most splendid heiress in England, with a title and great ducal connection, would be what he must eventually look for.



Diana soon heard of this announcement, and was greatly diverted. She looked forward to that night when she would meet the young lord at a ball ; for these young people met somewhere every day, just as if they were stopping in the same house, and "they would have such a laugh over it." The young lord came to the ball ; but she soon noticed he had a shy and scared look. Indeed he came up and went through a sort of "duty dance," but was "short" in his answers and eager to get away. The faintest change of this sort is perceptible, and Diana understood it all in a second, as much as though he had come up and told her.

The quick eye of General Lady Margaret also saw how things were. "He is frightened," she said to herself, "mean little cub ! She's far too good for him."

Diana was a little annoyed and vexed ; but she had great pride, and tossed her pretty head when she saw "Pat" positively gazing at her, from a coign of vantage. But there were plenty to fill the gap, who rushed in chivalrously—notably another young lord, Lord Mountabor—handsome, manly, sensible, sure to do in the world, and worth a dozen of the "empty-headed" Patmore. This gentleman really admired Diana, but had kept away in consideration of the ground being preoccupied.

One of the curious features in human character was expressed by a character in the *Beggar's Opera*, in certainly a coarse turn, but which is still broadly true. There a rude observer hinted paradoxically that one of the secrets for "keeping the men on" was, strange to say, keeping them off. In other words, indifference is one of the spurs to regard. A too great welcome, a devotion that approaches homage, only elevates the conceit of the soul thus worshipped. What is cheap, in short, is scarcely so valued. This is speaking now within the circle of worldly morality.

Before the night was over young Patmore was full of rage and repentance, was calling himself fool, "beast" even ; and at the end, when his rival was leading out Lady Margaret and her charge, could hardly contain

himself, and made his way up to form part of the *cortège*. He was just in time to hear Lady Margaret inviting his rival :

"Come up to us to lunch to-morrow, and we'll settle about the Opera."

Pat's eyes were on Diana, full of a bitter, killing, sulky reproach. She nodded to him gaily. "Flirt!" "coquette!" was on his mind.

That night, when he went home, he had made up his mind. He *believed* himself deeply in love with her, though in truth he was not. It was the toy denied to the child, and for which he is inclined to cry. But he had made up his mind. What others so valued must surely be valuable. Besides, she was really a "good match." There was credit in marrying "so fine a fortune," and even some in cutting out the other fellows, especially "that conceited ass," Mountabor, who had actually pushed in front of him when they were competing for Diana's cloaks, &c.

Diana and her matron talked over the night as they always did, and as we are told ladies always do. Such gossip is enjoyed with an exquisite relish. The battles of the night are fought over again in a sort of luxurious ease and delightful retrospect. Good spirits, the pardonable elation of triumph, give all the brilliancy of a photograph. There is an incisive truth, a vigorous touching and "dashing off" which Constance and Helen know not at other hours of the day.

"I don't know what is over that cub," Lady Margaret said in a ruminative way; "he is in some frump or other."

"Oh, it is only the *Cuckoo*," said Diana gaily; "it has frightened him, the foolish creature. And yet he is a good creature, too. He is so young," added she, with quite the air of an old person.

Lady Margaret was projecting herself into the future. "He is a very good match, dear," she said. "The dowagers are all polling for him. Lady Penwillion, that old schemer, would give her eyes for him, for that long daughter of hers. Now listen," Diana," added Lady

Margaret seriously; "you must really make up your mind."

"To what?" said Diana.

"To take Pat. You will never do better, dear. He is a good creature, and all that; and really it is my duty now to speak to you seriously." (Lady Margaret had got on what I believe is called a *peignoir*, and had set off her armour and encumbrances, her wreath, combs, &c, and was folding herself up comfortably in an arm-chair, with her feet on the fender.) "You see, my dear, your position is a very serious one. You are quite helpless; and if anything happened to me—which may at any moment—and you know what Sir Duncan told me the other day——"

That eminent physician had told her she was of "too full a habit of body;" and that she must take plain fare, or "fatty degeneration" might "supervene,"—a caution the worthy lady was amused at; such destiny never affecting persons of condition, or at least only at some remote and distant period. And so she dined out and dined out; and the "habit of body" became slowly fuller and fuller.

"Now," she went on, "you know I consider myself in place of a mother, and have your interest at heart just as much. You know we cannot carry this on very long. Bowman is dying to be back at his place, and his trees, and his ploughboys. Then there is the new wing. So I tell you, dearest, it is all-important we should make the hay when we have the sun. And I tell you, if we were to wait till the Calends come back, we shouldn't get one as good."

"As who, dear?" asked Diana, laughing. "Do you mean Pat?"

"Yes. If I were choosing, I could not select a better."

"But," said Diana, laughing again, "this is so funny. Surely you saw him to-night, dear? We are two for ever."

"Ah, you child," said Lady Margaret good-humouredly,

"leave these things to me. You understand nothing of them. The man's over head in love, and will propose before the week is out—and you *must* take him."

Diana tossed her head.

"What! give up my liberty when I am only just beginning to see what this pretty world is?"

Lady Margaret stood up, and became grave.

"I am quite serious, Diana. You must do it. You don't know the perils that are round. You have no one but Bowman and me; and as for poor Bowman—well! You will be surrounded with schemers and adventurers, all desiring to prey on you; and your little head will be no match for them, my poor child."

Diana had never heard Lady Margaret speak so affectionately and so earnestly. She was quite touched; and going up to her, gave her a kiss.

"Good child," said Lady Margaret. "Now, think it over well to-night, for it is very, very serious; you might as well be left on a desert island to find yourself clothes and food, and your own dinner."

Diana went to bed thinking very seriously of this disastrous position. The "desert island" brought it home to her very forcibly. She saw how utterly helpless was her condition; and any one who took up the air of monitor or preacher had always an awful influence on her, and she went to bed that morning in a very sober state of mind.

The next day was more than filled in by the usual round; and in the programme there was a vast amount of what Lady Margaret would call "business" to be got through: appointments, visits, possibly a flower-show; the inevitable "Park"—which Wally Pepys said she would have been less disinclined to omit than her morning prayers. It was just after lunch when Diana was in the drawing-room, having snatched a hurried moment to water some plants, when an eager figure entered with a very flushed face and voice of trepidation. Diana coloured as she saw him. It was her young lord.

"I have called to see you," he said in the same

nervous tone; "and—I have called to see you," he could only repeat. "I wanted to speak about last night—I am afraid—I know I behaved like a savage."

Diana laughed genuinely.

"How? when? I never noticed it."

There was no danger evidently, so she could have her little "fun."

"No," he said, "I know you did not; because you are too gentle—too good—too angelic—too—"

Diana was a little alarmed now. This *did* look danger, and she half rose.

"Don't go," he said; "I came expressly to tell you how unhappy I am. What a miserable night I have had of it—tossing, I *assure* you—not closing my eyes—at least, until very early—"

Again Diana could not help smiling.

"Well," she said, "Lord Patmore, I forgive you for whatever it is, for you do seem so penitent; and now I think I must go to see if Lady Margaret—"

"No, no; not yet. I have something to tell you—something very important to propose. I mean—" he added, fretted at having used this awkward word. "But if I only knew that you had some liking for me—and did not hate me—"

"Hate you!" repeated Diana with amused wonder.

("Minx!" some of her friends would have called her.)

"Oh dear, why should you think that? Have I ever done anything?"

"You know," he went on, "what I am—at least; Lady Margaret does—and what they all think of me—and last year I could not tell you—it wouldn't be fair, you know—all the great matches they proposed to me: Lady this and that—connections that would have strengthened the family, and all that. And *this* year they went on with the same game, I assure you. But I didn't care for any of 'em, because—and I must tell you the reason—and I was thinking it all over last night—because there is no one like you; and if you would have me—now take time," he added desperately, "and think—think it well

over ; *and with* Lady Margaret too. She understands it better—”

“Oh,” said Diana, now in a flutter, “what is all this? Oh, I *am* so sorry.”

“You must think it over. I can wait—wait any time, you know—to the end of the season.”

What could Diana say? She could not bring herself to be blunt, and hurt one who had paid her such a compliment. She was quite unequal to the situation. But happily at that moment the door was opened, and General Lady Margaret spurred in briskly to take the command of the situation.

“I think, dear,” she said, “Madame Cerise or some of them are waiting for you. Go down to them, darling.”

Diana obeyed orders at once, and her guardian took possession of the guest. Diana did not wish to disturb them ; though half an hour and more passed away, she did not venture to return. Then she heard him bounding down the stairs, and departing in great elation. Then the General summoned her.

“What did I tell you, dear, last night?” she said with pardonable triumph, and indeed it seemed to Diana something like divination ; “he has settled it all with me.”

“Oh, but I can’t,” said Diana, excited. “I was going to tell him so when he said he would wait.”

“Now, dear, leave it to the old head. Exactly what I told him. He *is* to wait—there is the sensible footing—to the end of the season. The poor child says as long as you like ; and *then*, if you have learned to like him—which of course you will—”

Diana looked very grave.

“Oh, indeed, I can do no such thing, dear. I should be miserable ; you know I should. I must speak to him plainly. I can give him no hopes, and shall be the same then as I shall be now.”

“You can’t tell him that, dear ; and if you do, then send him about his business. Now really, Diana, sit down there. This is too serious a thing to be light or childish about. It is not fair to the man—not honour-

able; indeed it is not. Not fair, dear. Coming here day after day; dining with him; the talk of every one; leading him on; making yourself so conspicuous. I assure you the most heartless flirt could not have done more. You should have told me—even last night, Diana.”

Our heroine was silent. For this ingenious way of putting on her what she had really no part in she had no answer ready. In presence of this greater mind she was helpless. She could not argue or reason; and she almost felt that she had not behaved handsomely.

Lady Margaret saw all this, and judiciously struck it with the “point” she had mentioned before.

“You know there is no hurry; at the end of the season you can do what you like with him; and when I am discharging the servants, you can do the same with him. And in fact, dear, I told him as much; and it’s all settled; so there it stands; and don’t be unkind to the poor wretch, or make him miserable and shoot himself, or do something equally dreadful.”

This artful arrangement was thus concluded. “A dreadful business,” perhaps a scene, which Diana shrunk from always, and which pained that little head always, was thus averted. Responsibility was staved off. She still could not but wonder at and admire the amazing instinct of her guardian, who thus knew, and even foretold, what was going to happen. It was a triumph—and not unpleasing; for the agitated transports of the young lord had moved her.

But still it was a mere pleasant dream. She did not seriously think a moment of a solemn alliance. There was time—years before her, and this was a *délassement*.

The drive, too long delayed, had to be postponed, giving place to this important event. It was about four o’clock; Lady Margaret and her *protégée* were still “talking it over”—the former dwelling on the *prestige* which would follow when this conquest became known. Then there was duty—the arrear of visits, &c., to be attended; then came evening and night; and Lady Margaret went up to get on her harness once more.



## CHAPTER XII.

### DEFEAT.

**D**IANA was already dressed ; fresh as the bouquet she had in her hand—the choicest and most costly flowers, sent by the young lord. She was always ready to the moment ; her protectress was infinitely more laborious and careful in her preparations. In her choice flowers and rich dress—a triumph of Madame Cerise’s art—she seemed the last choice bit of nature’s Sèvres. She was in good spirits, and not a little elated with the events of the day. Suddenly she heard a step on the stairs, and Lugard strode in. She had forgotten him ; the great petition—all that was depending on it—was to be decided that very evening. The flushed face, the wild and excited eye, the dark weight of gloom and despair on his face, told her the event. She ran to him.

“Oh, my poor Richard, I am so, so sorry !”

He flung himself on the sofa.

“No, I don’t want pity, or anything of that sort. It’s all over at last. This finishes me.”

“Indeed no, Richard ; you must not give way. Don’t think of it now.”

“It is easy to say that to a ruined man ! It is all over at last. I may give up now ; I shall never survive the mortification.”



"Oh, you will ; you will," Diana said, at her wit's end to know what shape of comfort to offer ; her gentle face, too, filled with the deepest compassion. "You will find something else ; I know you will. And we will all help you."

"I want no help from any one. I have nothing now to live for ! What is to become of me ? But it was all planned from the beginning by him—that mean, scheming fellow. This was part of his devilish scheme ; just to let me seem to win at first, to give me a greater mortification. But if I live only for that one thing, it will be to pay him back. By Heaven I will !"

Lady Margaret entered, a great expanse of silk and laces ; she was on pleasure bent. She had no thought for the serious prose of life at that hour.

"Captain Lugard here ?" she said carelessly. "Are you coming with us ?"

"No, no ; he is not," said Diana ; "and I am so sorry for him."

"Good heavens ! what has happened ?"

"I am no longer Member of Parliament. They have turned me out."

"Oh, I am sure we are so sorry," said Lady Margaret, in about the tone she would have declined an invitation ; "but you will try again. There was young Ventnor, he got in for some other place, after he was unseated. That's what is done always. Diana dear, I am afraid—"

"And pray where am I to get money to do that ? Where am I to get money to pay the frightful sums all this has cost me ? Where am I to get enough to keep a house over my head ?"

"Good gracious !" said Lady Margaret, scared, "is it so bad as that ? Your father surely—"

"We will all help," said Diana eagerly ; "we are such old friends."

"Now, I don't want any of this," said Lugard, pacing about ; "if I can keep my senses, it is enough—if I can keep on until I have time and opportunity to be even with *him*."

"Now, Diana dear, I *really* think we *must*—we promised, you know. Good night, Mr. Lugard; don't be cast down; it's the commonest thing in the world."

She went downstairs with a stately rustling. Diana was following, but stole back. He was sitting with his face buried in his hands.

"Dear Richard, don't. You know I am your old friend; and you shall get over this, and we shall help you through it."

It was hard to resist the engaging manner in which this comfort was offered. He looked up.

"You are always kind. But the best thing for me is to sink at once, and make no struggle. Go to your party."

"Come early in the morning, and we will talk it over," said Diana confidentially, and tripped away.

It had gone ill indeed with the hapless Lugard. Money, time, *prestige*, everything was gone. The motion for the soldiers' wives—how absurd that seemed now! So brief an enjoyment of honour is no better than a short dream.

Not an hour before the new member had been introduced by the Solicitor-General Storks, and the Right Hon. W. Bodmin, Patronage Secretary. A happy and triumphant moment for the young barrister. It would have been far more so had Mrs. Bligh been there; but she was away in France, for her health, it was said. He sat for a time to enjoy the new scene; and then a barrister-member and friend came to him and said, "Mind, you are coming with me to Williamson's to-night. You promised him to bring your blushing honours to his house."

Bligh agreed, and the two gentlemen went away. Williamson—the Right Hon. Sir John Horsley Williamson—was the Attorney-General; and Lady Jane Williamson was Lord Malpas's daughter. Not often do the mouldy men of law, who burrow their way up to the Chancellorship from regions below, make such alliances; and Lady Margaret and other persons of condition were quite willing to welcome their sister and her connections.

"We shall see all sorts of queer Yahoos, my dear," she

said, "and their odd wives. But I know Lady Jane's people are coming to her in good force."

Sir John Williamson, though he could give one of the best opinions at the bar "on title," scarcely enjoyed, as Mr. Pepys said, an honourable reciprocity—for title had not so handsome an opinion of him. He moved among Lady Jane's noble friends a small, dry, clerk-like, old-fashioned little man, of no more account there than his own footman, and delighted to meet some of his own profession, who with infinite difficulty had been admitted.

It was past twelve o'clock when our hero—or one of our heroes—Robert Bligh, came in, and did him a homage which every barrister feels for so august a person as the Attorney-General.

Sir John, who had been cast away, as it were, on a dry spit of land, elbowed by guardsmen in the most unconcerned way, now lighted up when he saw Bligh.

"Come from taking your seat?" he said. "New member; very glad to see you. I must introduce you to Lady Jane."

Not a few among the men looked with interest after Bligh. Victory of any kind is always received favourably. If you cannot be the shape of a rose, it is something to know the rose, or be in the same room with it. He was not a mouldy, worn-out young barrister, weak-eyed and unwholesome, but handsome and sociable.

Lady Jane snatched a moment from Major Hancock of the Life Guards to say—

"Mr. Bligh, do you know many people? You must let me introduce you. There is Miss Gay, our great heiress—but she is going to be married."

Bligh gave a genuine start. "Going to be married!"

Diana was taking her usual nightly exercise, flying round in the valse she so loved; besieged with offers, and entering her engagements as though she were a little fairy bookmaker on a racecourse. In these relations she was as honest as the sun, and was never known to "throw over" even the most persevering and adhesive "scrub" of a creature, of whom every young beauty has one at

least who is her plague. Diana when she saw him started, and broke from her partner, who did not relish her *empressment*.

"Oh, Robert," she said, "so you are successful; and I am so glad. Yet poor Richard—"

"I feel for him as much," he said; "but what can I do? He would enter on this foolish course. But what is this they tell me? I have to congratulate you, it seems."

He was grave, and seemed sincere.

"Oh, on this report?" she said impatiently. "Oh, there is no truth—that is, I am to do as I please. But every one is worrying me."

"Patmore is a good fellow, and will turn out well when he gets older; and I *know* he has a great regard for you. You know I am still a sort of guardian, so it is my duty to advise; and I would think seriously. I had some of his papers before me, and I assure you he will be enormously rich."

"So *you* advise me?" said Diana, tossing her head; "I can settle all that myself, thank you, Mr. Robert Bligh, M.P. I suppose *now* you are to be quite a great man—above all our little trifling. I wonder you don't feel more for poor Richard, on whose ruins you have risen."

"Oh, as for that," said he calmly, "I have given up sentiment a good deal. I found it so heavy—so annoying to carry about. No one cared for it; and it was no good to myself; so—"

"So you got rid of it altogether?"

"Yes, Miss Diana, and in every way. Now I am going to live selfishly, and a good deal for myself. The great point, they tell us, is to *get on*, and to get on with enjoyment to yourself. I have thought a great deal over these things lately, and have begun to think more of the world in which we all live, and of its enjoyments. You see I am here at a ball, and mean to dance too. I am engaged to some young lady, for whose name Lady Jane Williamson is responsible; but I shall know her by her face. She said she was one of the prettiest here."

"And have you forgotten Miss Buller?" said Diana, with infinite scorn. "Upon my word you are coming out. Who has been teaching you this?"

"Well," said Bligh, smiling, "you gave me a lesson or two—do you recollect? so did poor Lugard; so did the world. Among all these instructors I have picked up something. Now with the House, and this new career, and all my new friends—and you can't imagine the number I have found since four o'clock to-day—I am likely to do very well. Ah, there is my young lady! Is she not pretty?"

The next thing Diana saw was Mr. Robert Bligh, according to the hackneyed phrase, in "the mazes of the dance." On many sides she heard his name. "Clever young man—unseated the man who was member for Calthorpe."

Diana was a little fretful and provoked—she was no actress—and she felt a sort of pang as she saw now that her old friend and favourite, whose success she had admired, had in reality grown indifferent to her. Success had spoiled him, she thought. 'This indifference, she was sure, was not put on, for he was so goodnatured with it—a sure test; for *acted* indifference is always overdone, and is attended with a certain brusqueness and savagery. Yes, she thought, he will now be so courted and admired, and perhaps flattered, he will cease to think of his old friends.

Pleasant little natures like those of Diana expect all, but are unreasonable enough to think that nothing is to be expected from them. Again she heard the praise, like a chime—"so clever—brilliant fellow—will make as how in the House—upset a man called Lugard." Poor Lugard! Even with her, who was so compassionate for all his troubles and misfortunes, the feeling was tinged with the pity which is disguised contempt, though she was unconscious of it. Bright young girls, fine creatures with flashing eyes and rich dresses—some of our English "meeses" which Frenchmen so admire—these seemed to be floating round the enchanted Bligh, like the fairies in a pan-

tomime round a hero who has been lost in a wood. Something passed through Diana's mind in this shape—that she should be one of these wood-fairies, and she would lay herself to bring back this deserter to her little camp and tiny colours.

Bligh was indeed enjoying himself. He was at that moment, according to the American phrase, being “buttonholed” by Sir John Williamson, and Diana heard some of the conversation even. “Of course, if you press for it, we should be very glad indeed. The Attorney-Generalship of the Southern Palatine is now worth a good deal; there is so much ‘manufacturing’ crime about there.”

Diana asked Bligh about this, and he told her how Mr. Gardiner, the “Q.C.,” had just died, and this office of provincial prosecutor was now vacant, and had been offered to him. It was worth about a thousand, and no trouble.

“A thousand a year and no trouble,” said Diana, with expanding eyes. “How charming!”

“Yes,” he said, smiling, “no trouble; that is the great point. I hope you recollect an old promise you made me long ago; but you won’t keep to it, I know.”

“What!” said Diana, pleased; “indeed I will, if I *did* promise; or I will promise now, if you like.”

“The settlements, I mean. Lady Margaret, I think, was present. You said I was to have the drawing of them. I shall take care of your interests, never fear, and ‘tie him up’ properly.”

Diana did not relish this goodnature at all. “Oh, I don’t know,” she said. “Why do you suppose such a thing?”

In short, this was one night, of which there were many patterns, in Diana’s life—it was part of the regular round; yet she did not enjoy this night so much. Lord Patmore was gloomy and morose. He was thinking of the splendid “sacrifices” he had made—the noble offers. Was this the treatment?—this sort of indifference. The usual procession was then formed towards three o’clock,

and Lady Margaret was escorted out with the usual tenderness and delicacy by her young men. They rolled home in the great chariot.

"'Pon my word," said Lady Margaret, "our friend Robert *has* got up. After all, poor Richard was not fit for that sort of thing, as they say he wanted ballast. Do you know what Williamson said to me? That Robert was just the fellow that would hang on firm until he fastened on the Chancellorship one of these days. Of course; wonderful young man he is, if he don't get airs."

"He *is* a little altered," Diana said thoughtfully.

"I dare say. Well, dear, what did you think of poor Pat to-night? Old Lady Vortigern, I assure you, she wouldn't speak to him. I felt as proud to-night as if I had won a battle, dear. The *Cuckoo* will have something to announce in real earnest now."

Somehow, Diana did not respond to this triumphant view. Was it a turning back to the past, or the shadow of a presentiment? Yet she was very happy on this night.

When they got into their hall, there were some letters and papers, which usually waited for them. Lady Margaret gathered them up. When they were in their room before the fire, and she had got her harness off, the General looked at them complacently. There was one "big blue letter with a seal," addressed to Diana—that important young lady always got a whole mail—the considering of which caused the little pale forehead to contract. The answering was not so difficult, as she recognised the value of that capital rule of leaving by letters for a certain time to settle, and then a portion answered itself.

"One of their usual worryings," she said; "don't mind it to-night."

"My God!" cried Lady Margaret, her eyes fixed on the paper, "what *is* all this?"

Diana, pale, looked over Lady Margaret's shoulder, and read with her:

"*GAY v GAY.* .

"26 New Buildings, Queen Street.

"MADAM,—We beg to inform you that we have been instructed by our client, Miss Eugenie Gay, of Boulogne, to commence proceedings against you in ejectment for the lands and tenements of Gay Court. We shall feel obliged if you will refer us to your solicitor, who will accept service of the writ in this matter, at your earliest convenience.

"We remain, Madam,

"GRIFFITHS, BAKER, & CO."







## CHAPTER XIII.

### CHANGE.

**F**OR long after might Diana look back to that dreadful night with a sort of horror ; all seemed to have ended then. The lights were rudely extinguished ; everything was cold and dismal. The palace had changed to a gaol : instead of colours and hangings and rich decorations, the soft path, the sweet scents, the effulgence of light—all had gone—there were rough, rude, cruel stone flags and bars. It was over, indeed. The sweet little play of life, which she found so delicious, was finished—the curtain was down—the stage, the theatre gone.

She could hardly understand or realise it, and sat in her chair before the fire looking at the fatal document. Not much comfort was got from Lady Margaret.

“It may turn out nothing, my dear child ; or they may have to be bought off. But, you know, I must tell you, poor Gay always said there was something of this sort hanging over him ; and there *was* a story of that wild fellow, your uncle, getting picked up by some creature in France. God knows. We must only hope for the best, my poor child. You see, if you had listened to me about Patmore, it might have been all done and settled long ago. Now, of course, he'll take fright.”

“That,” said Diana, “I do not care about. Of course

he must know everything. Oh, to think of this coming on me ! And will they leave me nothing ? If they are entitled to it, of course they must have it. Poor dear Papa would not have kept it from them, if he had known it."

"Oh, folly, dear ; you must send and get the best advice, and the best counsel."

"Yes," said Diana, eagerly, "to Robert—he will do everything for me. And yet, O——"

"Of course he must ; but in the regular way. We'll send to him the first thing in the morning. Now, don't let it weigh on your spirits. All will come right, I am sure. By the way, though, that woman," said Lady Margaret with a sudden start—"she couldn't have something to do with this?"

"Oh dear, no," said Diana, absently ; "though she did not like me. Oh, this is very, very cruel ! What is to become of me?"

The reader will perhaps have noted that there was already a sort of faint change in Lady Margaret. She was a perfect woman of business—a woman of the world—and at her age felt that every hour was in value equal to three or four at another period of life. Hence, here was nearly a whole season wasted. Here, too, was a loss of prestige, of credit, in being the patroness of, and voucher for, this poor little craft, which had turned out so unfortunately. She had an affection for Diana ; but was put out by this "crossness" of things. She slept well that night. Poor Diana tossed and tossed ; fancied she was already degraded, sentenced, deposed, and turned out a pauper on the world.

Early she sent off a note to Robert—in faltering characters, and in a style that seemed to falter—begging of him to come to her *at once*, as she had something most serious to ask him about : and she knew that he would help her.

When this was gone, she sat earnestly waiting with a load at her young heart. Robert would fly to her, would help and stand by her, and forgive her treatment of him ;

she knew that. Here he was—no, it was Richard Lugard, excited still, and come at that early hour selfishly to dwell upon his wrongs, and talk over vengeance upon the head of the man he hated.

“Such a night,” he said, “as I have had ; such a miserable, frightful night ! But I shall know the worst soon. Why, what’s the matter, Diana ? You look ill too.”

Diana told him. “I cannot help you now as I hoped, Richard,” she said.

His eyes sparkled.

“But don’t you understand,” he said ; “don’t you see all this, who’s work this is ? Why, it’s a conspiracy ! I know it—he and his mother. Don’t you recollect how she threatened that day ? She said she would make you repent it. And, Diana,” he added, with flashing eyes, “*he* is in it too ! I *know* it ; because, do you remember when he was searching all those nights among the papers, and I warned you ? There’s the whole of it. That woman would do anything ; I know her well.”

Diana listened, wondering ; and could only faintly say, “Oh, impossible ! They could not be so base—so wicked.”

“Ask Lady Margaret what she thinks. The only thing now is to beat them—to baffle them. You must get some clever fellow that’s up to all this dirty work to meet them on their own ground.”

“Oh,” said Diana, distractedly, “I know no such people. I give up at once. I don’t know what to do, or whom to trust. I have no friend, it seems to me.”

“Yes, you have,” said Richard ; “and a real one, too. Ah, if you had only listened to me ! But that’s all over now. I know such a man—the very one for such cases—so clever and knowing ; he has managed such things before. If I had only taken his advice in this business of mine, I should have been in a different way. But he will dispose of him, never fear.”

They heard a step on the stair. Robert Bligh entered hastily. He coloured when he saw Richard ; but went up to him frankly.

"I wish it had been any one else but you, Lugard," he said. "That is all I will venture to say, as I know you do not like compliments of condolence."

"Oh, you may stop there. I want nothing approaching it from you. We are at arms'-length, recollect; and I don't look on the account between us as in any way closed. Understand that, to begin with, Mr. Robert Bligh, M.P."

"It is only what I expected," said the other calmly; "and you are the same as you always were. With all my heart then."

He turned to Diana with an inquiring look. He was too delicate to say, "What is it you wrote to see me about?"

"And there are others understand you, too," went on Lugard in growing excitement. "You are being found out gradually. That long and slow game won't pay with every one, I can tell you. She knows your unworthy scheme—your conspiracy——"

"Hush, Richard," she faltered; "*we know* nothing."

"Diana—Miss Gay," said Robert, turning to her, "what is this?"

"Let me speak for her," said Lugard. "This pretence won't answer. It is all new to you. You know nothing—no, of course, nothing of this action?" And he tossed over the attorney's letter to him.

Robert calmly read it; then bit his lip. His face contracted with an expression of pain.

"Now look at him. Let him dare say he knows nothing."

Diana did look.

"I do know nothing," he said; "and this news has shocked me more than I can say; but——"

"And have you no suspicion, then?" Lugard went on. "You would not wish to name absent persons. No, sir; your services and advice are not wanted here. She wants no double dealing, no double-handed treacherous assistance."

Bligh turned on him. "This is not the place for this

sort of language ; I shall give you other opportunities, if you desire them. I do not volunteer assistance here, though I would be glad to aid. Miss Diana Gay knows me long enough to suppose that I would help her with every power of my heart, soul, and strength. I may ask her *that*."

Diana paused ; then raised her eyes.

"Indeed you have always been good to me. But still, in this cruel blow that has come upon me, it is so strange that Mrs. Bligh should have threatened me, and—"

Bligh's face fell ; he did not answer, but covered his face, and gave a half-groan.

"By heaven," said Lugard, starting up and striking the table, "I am right ! Answer ; you owe it to her, you owe it to that justice and honour which is always in your mouth, to say distinctly, here and before us, what is at the bottom of this. Do you know, do you *suspect* even *that Mrs. Bligh has anything to do with it ?*"

Still Robert did not answer.

"Oh, Robert Bligh, don't let me think that."

At length Bligh spoke, and very slowly. He was very pale.

"I have not seen her for many weeks."

"Ah, there's a fencing witness for you !" said Lugard.

"I know nothing of her proceedings. What I know or suspect is nothing to you," Robert said, turning fiercely to Lugard.

"A bullying witness too."

"But this much I will say," added Bligh, turning to Diana : "I dare not help you now, after such suspicion, or such a charge. But still, let me implore you, be on your guard. Mind me in this, at least. Take care whom you trust, and do not be led by those who affect to be in your interest. I shall do what I can, though at a distance, to befriend you—*that* you may count on."

He was gone. To Diana, Lugard said with exultation, "After all, there is compensation. His victory is not so great. I shall match him in this yet, though he may be

*M.P.* Oh, Diana, I feel no disappointment, and have something to look forward to now."

Lady Margaret came. She wisely and authoritatively indorsed all that Lugard said. There could be no doubt the Blighs were at the bottom of the whole. She had always a sort of regard for the "dashing" character of Richard Lugard. He described his agent—the man he recommended for the situation — Page; he inspired Diana with hope. It would "blow over" under the skilful hands of Page, who would find perhaps there was nothing in it at all. They were two women. Once Diana faintly pleaded for her old friend; but Bligh's refusal to contradict the charge was conclusive.





## CHAPTER XIV.

### A SORE TRIAL.

**T** was a rueful business for poor Diana, going through the regular routine—the heavy coach swinging along, the drive, the visit, the thousand and one antics and *fadasies* of fashion, with this sword swinging over her head as they rolled along. The worst was, that omniscient evening paper, the lively *Regent Street Chronicle*, which always had some fresh titbit of social news, and a number of which was like a five-minutes' chat with a clever clubman, had a short paragraph on the matter in the agreeable page devoted to *faits divers*:—

“The class of persons that seem to be known to penny-a-liners only as ‘gentlemen of the long robe’ are to have good work cut out for them, in a substantial *cause célèbre* which will affect the whole estates of a beautiful young heiress whose name must be very familiar to the Court-newsman. In the common language of ordinary Englishmen, a suit in ejectment has been commenced to recover possession of the estates of Gay Court, the plaintiff claiming as child of an elder brother of the late owner. There is said to be a French marriage,—secret, of course,—an heir hidden away by an unnatural grandmother, and details of the most thrilling sort. When we add that Mr. Hawker has been retained to lead for the

plaintiff and state her case (she is a young girl, and called Eugenie), we have said enough to whet, and at the same time to stay, the stomach of the most voracious admirer of what is called the romance of real life. The famous correspondent of a certain daily paper even now must be sharpening his pen. We hope in a few days to be able to present our readers with an outline of this case from a special and exclusive source."

Mr. Page, the solicitor, was a young man of not more than thirty, who dressed exceedingly well, and was not by any means of the mouldy, ascetic class to which law-agents are supposed to belong. He had a bright face, got his clothes from the best tailors, and went to balls and parties. This brought him in contact with "officers and gentlemen" who asked him to dine at mess, and went to him when they got into any scrape. What riveted this connection, and quite brought him into leading military business, was a little affair down at Richmond on one of the Derby-days, when a party of gentlemen belonging to a Guards regiment, and crowded on a drag, were coming home filled with wine and spirits (of an animal sort), and passing through that pretty townlet, discharged a whole volley of oranges at an honest householder standing at his door, and looking at the procession going by. Much damage was done to him, and, one of the horses growing restive at the turn, the police had time to come up, and arrest two of the gentlemen identified by the burgess. Being released on bail, they appeared next morning, accompanied by Mr. Page, who had been with them, and actually dined with them that night; and he took so many points, and managed the whole so cleverly, that the two officers were discharged in triumph, and the burgess went home rather damaged in character with his neighbours. On this success, it seemed that nothing legal could be done in the army without Page's aid. That gentleman was always being invited to dine, which he delighted in; was introduced to generals, colonels, &c., and saw before him a prospect indeed of getting into high life at last. He was found very useful in arranging with



creditors, advancing himself also, and was never a pressing creditor. He used indeed to say, in a gentlemanly fashion, just as one brother-officer might say to another, that he must have that money back, if convenient, or, indeed, whether it was convenient or not, as he was in a terrible way himself; and though he would not like to press, still he could not be expected to suffer himself. It was this virtue that recommended him to Lugard, who threw himself entirely into his hands, or arms even. It was Page who arranged everything for the petition, who had furnished the money "to fee" voracious counsel; but it was Page who spoke to Lugard in a very altered tone on the morning after.

"This is a very blue look-out," he said gloomily. "I counted on this. I have had to raise the money, and was sure of success. I can't afford to lose it, or even to wait. I am quite run out among them all. What do you propose?"

"Nothing," said Lugard, colouring. "You don't mean to say you're going to turn on me in this way, are you? By Heaven, that's too sharp practice altogether. I haven't a halfpenny. You must wait, as other fellows do, and give me time."

"I can *not*," said Mr. Page bluntly. "The money must be made out. You must sell."

Lugard started. "Sell!" he cried: "is *that* it? Is that what you are at? So now we are coming out in our true colours, it seems—the regular Shylock."

"I don't mind all this," said the other, smiling. "You know it must be done if I say it or wish it. I know I am under great obligations to you for various services, but that would be paying too high. Seriously, *very* seriously, what do you propose?"

"I was going to propose a capital good thing," said Lugard savagely; "but you may do your worst now, and you shall never have it. A great lawsuit for a young girl of the best family, and in the highest society. I'll find plenty that will help me, and help her too."

This charming opening had a deep effect on Mr. Page.

They were the elements that could tempt him most. "I could tell you something myself," he said. "I know what you allude to; it is this suit of Miss Diana Gay. Well," he continued slowly, "I do not wish to be harsh or pressing, though there are others who will be harsh and pressing enough with me. If I see my way in this matter, and the thing looks at all feasible— But you said the same of the election."

"So we thought—so we all thought," said Richard, impetuously.

"I must see her—see her at once," said Mr. Page; "for no time is to be lost."

Richard hesitated. "She knows no more than we do, nothing more than was in that writ. It's all a mere imposture."

"Just as you please; but if I am to move in it, I must see her, and have her own instructions."

That evening Mr. Lugard brought his solicitor, Mr. Page, with him to Diana. The current of her life had indeed changed. Even this interview had the air of part of the great responsibility that had so suddenly come upon her. When the two gentlemen arrived, and saw Diana *alone*, "on business," Lugard even noticed the anxious worn look in her eyes, the strained expression in her face. Lady Margaret was out on *her* business; for with this true lady of the world, as the hours of life shortened, they became more precious, in a ratio that seemed like the mysterious expanding power of the horseshoe problem. She could not afford to waste these diamond moments in looking back. There was a charming girl she had just come to know, Miss Pollexfen—with only a father sure to inherit the Pollexfen estates, and no female relative to speak of. She was not a heartless or an unfeeling person, Lady Margaret; but the world was with her, life. She must move on, and she could not help going to call on this young lady. Her sensitive worldy mind already was disturbed at the change she experienced. Perhaps she thought the world, her friend, had begun to look coldly on her as being unsuccessful, or associated with a failing cause.

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Poor Diana had nothing to tell, nothing to show, but that awful and fatal paper which had been the first notice of the blow. Mr. Page, very deferential, and with his eyes fixed on her, put some questions with due apologies. Had she ever heard her father allude to the possibility of such a thing—had there ever been even the question asked—had this Gay left any children? Diana could not say; she was bewildered; she could not lay her mind to think.

"It's all a trumped-up business," said Lugard impetuously. "We'll expose them!"

"*Well*," said Mr. Page, turning on him slowly. "How, pray? Will you let us hear your plan, then; what can you know, pray?" He paused a moment. "No, no; we must have no talking or boasting; this is too serious a matter."

"You think so?" said Diana, looking at him wistfully. "Oh, then, what is to be done?"

"I am sorry, truly sorry, to speak in this way," said Mr. Page gently; "but it is for the best that you should know the truth: I think so indeed. I have experience of these sort of cases; and they would not dare to come forward unless there was something substantial to go upon. But are you willing to trust in me—in my labour, skill, and devotion to your interest? for I am always devoted to every client whose case I take up."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Diana helplessly.

"Suppose so!" repeated Mr. Page smiling. "Ah, I see; that will scarcely do. I have no wish to force myself on you. I was brought here, recollect."

"Of course, Diana," said Lugard, "you mean to give Page every authority? I did so."

"That has no connection with this matter," said the solicitor coldly. "Recollect this is not a business for mere legal duty—instructing counsel, drawing out a brief, as Lady Margaret's respectable firm would do. There must be plot and counter plot, prying and probing; mean, nasty, ungrateful, dirty work. Excuse me saying so, Miss Gay: I mean ungrateful to *me*."

Lugard walked impatiently over to the window, smiling scornfully.

"Listen," went on Mr. Page. "Already I have my own theory about all this. I must see at once whether there is anything to support it ; I shall look about it this very night. There is no hurry for a week or so, at least. I shall go at once, and shall see you again in a few days ; and in the meantime, having heard what I shall report, you can then decide, Miss Gay."

"Oh yes," said Diana, "that is very fair."

"Further, we shall prepare a case, and have it laid before some eminent counsel-friend, or some one that Lady Margaret Bowman's solicitors shall approve of."

"But where are you going to ?" said Diana.

He shook his head. "Excuse me, we shall see all that by-and-by ; because I may be wrong, and it will end in nothing. But that is all settled. It is quite understood, I hope, Miss Gay, the footing on which I come here and take up this business."





## BOOK THE THIRD.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE OLD ROUND.

**L**ADY MARGARET returned a little heated and put out. She had seen some people, and had come a little suddenly on a large tea-party, where she had met some odious people whom she disliked, and who she knew were enjoying the business. These, with a malicious interest, and a more malicious sympathy, condoled with her on this trial, and were malignantly curious about details. She thought, too, she was neglected, and postponed to a new and wealthy lady who was rising on the horizon. The Pollexfen heiress, too, had not shown the interest she had counted on. Yet when she returned, and found Diana poorly, and with the troubled "scared" look on her face, she was touched, and ran to infold her in an embrace of rustling silk and lace.

"Poor child," she said, "now it will all come right; I know it will!"

On that night they were to go on the invariable and never-failing "parade," as one of the old officer-friends called it; and the young Lord Patmore was to attend them.

"The boy is always late," said Lady Margaret; "and we shall be half-an-hour on the stairs."

She was right. They had to wait some ten or twelve minutes or so after the hour. She had made the great argosy wait at the door; and then a note was brought in to Diana. It ran:—

"DEAR MISS GAY,—I am obliged to go to the country to-night on business, and cannot go with you to the ball. Pray excuse me to Lady Margaret Bowman. I am not well.  
PATMORE."

Lady Margaret gave a sort of snort. "Not well: fiddle-de-dee! This is some of his wretched acting and clever little trickery, as he thinks it."

Diana, dressed for the sacrifice, coloured, but tossed her head scornfully. "We don't want him at all," she said; "and, thank Heaven, I never did. I understand—"

"Nonsense, dear," said Lady Margaret; you do not. Keep up your heart, you know, before those people; for they'll be watching you, dear, and making out all sorts of things. I know that wretched Wally Pepys has been inventing all sorts of lies, just to give himself importance, and get a dinner in return for his information; so, dear, don't be looking dejected, but dance away merrily."

With this judicious encouragement they entered the arena; but Diana's attempt at looking indifferent only produced a scornful expression on her pretty mouth. She fancied every one was looking at her. In reality the world does not care so much for us, and our concerns, as to let even the enjoyment of our coming misfortune interfere with their regular sports. The story was whispered about, "That's the young girl spoken of in the *Regent-street Chronicle*. It's all coming on next month."

Several of her and Lady Margaret's friends and male retainers, as they might be called, were away, or obliged to go to some other party, which accidentally made the night scarcely so triumphant as had been some others. It looked like neglect; and Diana said to herself bitterly, "Oh, how like this cruel world!"

Lady Margaret was out of humour. There had been also some *mal-entendu* about her midnight meal.

As we have said, there was no conspiracy, nothing cruel; but Diana's gentle sensitiveness seemed to detect a change. Still, here was a good-natured face, a little spare figure, in front of Diana, who had just come back from a rather dismal dance. It was Sir John Williamson, the Attorney-General. Yonder was Lady Jane "instructing counsel," that is, surrounded with admiring gentlemen. Sir John had to go out now and again, just as the carriage and servants would be ordered at eleven o'clock. He bore it very well, and indeed was rather proud of his showy lady.

He took Diana's hand cordially. "Dancing away," he said. "I wonder what dancing is like. I would give the world to know the feeling, the enjoyment. Will you come down and have an ice? No, I am not ornamental enough."

"Delighted," said Diana, with alacrity; "what an unkind speech!"

"So we are going to have a little law-suit," he went on as they descended. "My poor child, to pick you out to be worried in this way! Well, I am not going to worry you either; but you know this is all in my trade. Now tell me about it," he added seriously. "I want to know; for I have great interest in you, my dear child, and we must do our best for you."

"Oh, how kind of you, Sir John!" said Diana. "But it is so sudden, and it has frightened me, you know. I am alone, I may say, and have so few to turn to, since—since my poor darling left me."

"Nonsense; you have plenty. Tell me, would you be afraid to pay a busy man a visit in his own study to-morrow morning, and we'll talk it over seriously?"

Diana's eyes brightened.

"You are so good, Sir John. Indeed, I will. That is, though, I have nothing to tell as yet; but they are going to make it all out."

"Very well," he said; "we can put it off until they do

make it out. Just tell your solicitor, when he has his case pretty well ready, to send the papers, and I'll give you a good opinion—at least as good as is going. Don't think of it a moment. Those things are very likely made up to extort money. There, there's Welbore coming to claim you."

This comfort put Diana quite in spirits again, and the kindness of the great law-officer's manner quite comforted her. "I will come, indeed," she said; "and it is so good of you." Then they went home.

Sir Duncan Denison, physician-in-ordinary to the Queen, had been calling in occasionally at Lady Margaret's, and in his playful, fashionable way, so as not to give alarm to anybody, had warned her—his finger up—about the "fulness," and those "dangerous dinner-parties."

"A year in one of those ascetic monastic orders, my dear Lady Margaret," he said, "would do us all a world of good."

Lady Margaret, indeed, thought poorly of the faculty; they were "all fiddle-de-dee, my dear;" and she only tolerated her friend Sir Duncan for the gossip he brought "from those little dark dens at St. James's," and above all, from Hampton Court, where he had a large *clientèle* among the honourable spinsters, and lean and slippered pantaloons of quality, who were there *en pension*.

He was "the most agreeable creature, my dear." He had always some bit of sweetbread in his pocket—that is, a succulent morsel of scandal—that was singularly toothsome. The doctor himself relished it quite as much; was, indeed, as his friends said, a true old woman of the Court; and after the first minute or two forgot his profession, and was in an easy-chair, pouring out his stores of news.

Lady Margaret, laughing at his warning, had this season made one of her most vigorous campaigns in the dinner-party way. Having "got Bowman" to take the house, she enjoyed the novelty, and, as it were, made up for past and lost time. Very soon she had forgotten



Diana's trouble, that spectral sword which was hanging over the young girl's head, and gave that worn and troubled look to those bright eyes.

"My dear," said Lady Margaret, "I suppose it will all come right. These are some low creatures, depend upon it; and this is their story."

She had been worried herself a good deal of late. Bowman was talking about the expense, and the bills were coming in; that for the argosy and the great horses had "on job" was frightful. But there was a great business approaching—a select and royal ball, given in honour of the Prince of Rumpenböttel, who, it was supposed, wished for one of the junior English princesses for his son, and it was thought was very likely to succeed. He had brought his son—Fritz—a long, yellow, hulking young German, and everything was going on prosperously, the ground being indeed smooth, laid out in velvet grass, from the known partiality of the English nation for these sort of alliances.

There was one ball given at the palace to the regular crowd, the genteel rank-and-file, when the grand staircase and the "splendid suites of rooms," &c., were thrown open, "and the place really swarmed, my dear, with members," and the commoner sorts of lords. But there was to follow a far choicer and more restricted business—the line to be drawn, the gilt cord stretched across; and to get inside, under, or even stride over this barrier, if it could be done with decency, was the struggle now going on. It was, according to Lady Margaret's favourite phrase, to be "all the elect and select, my dear."

In nearly every "set," circle, or community, each person has certainly a fellow, or family, with a particular and odious relation to him or her—the rock ahead, as the gentlemen of tragedy would call it—a sort of Grundy, which rises, Jack-in-the-box-like, at every moment the other wishes to rise, and thus gets in the way of the light or the warmth, or in any advantage that may be coming. In short, these are really the persons "made for each other;" and every one of us has this mysterious relation

to some obstructive. Do we wish to quaff the cup of bliss, they must go near to snatching it from us, or at least put their detestable lips to it at the same moment, when it becomes as good as poisoned. When the bliss has not yet come, but coming, we see their shadow on the ground gradually enlarging. It is an eternal struggle; sometimes we vanquish them, but oftener they us. They are a sort of monster we cannot get rid of. We are fastened to each other according to the rule of the Danish punishment, and can only hew each other to death. Lady Margaret Bowman and Lady Mantower were in precisely this relation.

This "Mantower woman," as Lady Margaret called her, "had of late grown to a pitch that was becoming unbearable." Lady Margaret would swell and turn pink, and flush up hotly, as she spoke of her. She confronted Lady Margaret everywhere. She had more than her usual success, and Lady Margaret more than usual ill-luck. And here was this German ducal ball, which Lady Margaret Bowman "was moving heaven and earth" to get to, as the phrase runs, and for which that tremendous form of exertion had not helped her in the least. From Mr. Penguin, "who was about the Court," had come one morning a fatal reply—as it might be from the Home Secretary announcing that the law must take its course—and all hope had fled. She was deeply mortified. It was just like Bowman—good for nothing always—a man with all his county interest, and yet whom they no more regarded than if he was an old hunting-whip. The mortification seemed to take hold of her mind; and while poor little Diana needed all the comfort of talk and sympathy in her trouble, Lady Margaret would wander off to what she called this insult.

There was one of the usual dinner-parties coming on—cast in a mould, all in one piece, as it were: figures, company, table, attendants *en bloc*—so little variation was there—at the Mark Antrobus's. The same typical men and women; the same dresses, "low necks," and what she would have called "tow-row" headdresses. The

argosy came rolling and swinging up as usual, opened its porthole, and banged off its heavy steps, and groaned and reeled as its portly captain descended heavily; then righted with a spring of relief when she was on shore. Diana, duly attendant, stepped out lightly, and seemed to fly to the landing-place. It was the old form of entrance, the old simpering and welcome, the eternal pattern. When these veterans of society are in honourable *retraite*, how confused must be the retrospect—the past seeming to go round before their eyes, like that toy called the zoetrope, and showing confused dinner after dinner, that seem to “run into each other” with bewildering monotony.

It was a very stately dinner, the Antrobuses being wealthy and important people—highly fashionable too. Diana was very silent, yet never so interesting, as the young gentleman who took her down thought, and who did his utmost to cheer her, and perhaps to make himself agreeable. Alas, she had not seen the evening number of the *Regent-Street Chronicle*, the lively gentleman's paper, which seemed to keep its eye, as it were, on the case, and which gave now and again some mysterious bit of information about it, acquired no one knew how. Nearly every one in the company had seen it save Lady Margaret and her *protégée*, the former being about as likely to look at a newspaper as at a law-book: except indeed that Diana had to read out that one column in the *Morning Plush*, where the list of company, &c., was given. This little paragraph ran thus:

“It seems the *affaire* Gay progresses. We understand that within the last week a new and important link in the chain of evidence has been discovered. Those who have seen the plaintiff say that the likeness to the late Mr. Gay is something striking. The defendant's solicitor is on the Continent looking for facts; for the sake of the fair tenant in possession, it is hoped he will find none of the proverbially stubborn ones,”



## CHAPTER II.

### LADY MARGARET RETIRES.

**H**AD any one told of or shown this statement to Lady Margaret, it would have had little effect on her. Her mind was full of one subject—her rock ahead was there, sitting opposite, though she, Lady Margaret, had at least the satisfaction of being taken down before her. The “odious Mantower” was in great spirits, cordial even to her enemy, who little divined the reason of this hilarity. The former was quite cowed by this persecution. Diana noticed the growing colour in her cheeks, and that she did not speak much, but seemed quite to forget the wholesome caution of the Court Doctor. The “odious Mantower” was a tall, angular woman, whose daughters, long like herself, were dispersed round and about the table, “jerking their necks like storks,” so had their enemy thus unkindly described them. This elation disturbed Lady Margaret.

Presently, when the ladies had removed to the drawing-room, and were resolved in that committee of the whole house, and had commenced their mysterious Eleusinian mysteries of which the writer dare not speak, and hath no knowledge, suspecting that if mortal man were to intrude he would be justly sacrificed, again Lady Mantower broke out. The subject was the ducal ball, introduced by the lady of the house.

"We are not fine enough, it seems," she said, "for these German people. As they did not think of us, it was not worth taking trouble about."

Nearly every one joined in this judicious way of viewing the matter. Lady Margaret spoke of the whole with a sort of scorn.

"Your girls like this sort of thing," said the hostess to Lady Mantower; "and it will amuse them."

"Yes," said Lady Mantower; "they sent us an invitation. I am sure Rose and Mary will enjoy seeing the young prince. It was so nice of them, so kind, was it not?—I thought you were going," she added, turning to Lady Margaret. "But they tell me it is very difficult to get there."

It was notoriously hard to make that lady stagger under any blow; but she did on this occasion. It was the last straw; her presence of mind had all but given way, and she had nearly said, "What! you asked! it's false!" But the gentlemen were coming up, clustering each to some lady's feet with the old fatuous smile, as who should say, "How droll I am! what funny creatures we are!"

Diana noticed that Lady Margaret had a wild and confounded look, and seemed more flushed than she had perceived before. She had even observed with disquiet that *too* hearty meal, and determined that when they got home she would really get on some of her little coaxing ways—as it were, ornaments—and speak seriously, and implore her for her own sake to mind what Sir Duncan had said. Lady Margaret was so very full in person; that large figure was stored with all sorts of unwholesome juices.

In due time they were going out to the argosy, shining and glittering in the lamplight, Lady Margaret leaning heavily on Antrobus. Down went the steps, "thud, thud," like clods on a coffin.

"Such a pleasant evening!" said Lady Margaret, according to her old mechanical formula—and which she would have said still, had she been sitting the whole

night long on St. Lawrence's gridiron—"really charming!"

"So glad you liked it," said Antrobus. "And I hope, Miss Gay—" Diana was tolerably well trained also:

"I liked it so much!"

Then they rolled away home. Then Lady Margaret burst out in a fury.

"Who is she? What does she mean? You heard all that? Nice pass things are coming to. But I'll expose her; I know things about her—things if they were known, she daren't set her foot in the palace. They'd turn her out."

Diana had never heard her speak so excitedly.

"Don't think of it, dear," she said; it's not worth—"

"Not worth, child!" said Lady Margaret. "How can *you* know? Though, indeed it's getting not to be worth, when creatures of that sort—" Here she became silent.

Diana wondered at the excitement, at the trembling voice, and at this way—unusual with Lady Margaret—of looking at such a thing as a calamity.

On rolled the argosy, swinging round corners, flashing a blaze into some pedestrian's eyes like a mammoth policeman, and finally drew up at their house in Portman Square. Instantly the hall-door flew open, the steps were down, and Diana had fluttered out "like a bird," as her admirers would say. Lady Margaret's descent was always a more laborious and tedious business. "Jeames" or Thomas was ready, standing in all his height and majesty, his strong arm bent forward, which her ladyship used to clutch and grasp almost convulsively as she came out, a process against which "Jeames" made many a "servants'-all" protest, as being "houtreegious, reely;" protesting that "a man's harm hain't quite a balluster." But on this night Jeames's arm remained bent for some seconds, and her ladyship never stirred. Diana's little white figure was seen in the hall, waiting to receive her.

The great menial had come up the steps with a scared stride, to fetch a lamp, for the large figure within the argosy was quite at rest, and never stirred. Down

fluttered her ladyship's maid, and figures from below came rushing up; and some people in the street stopped and lingered curiously as they saw the lamp brought out, and the young girl in a cloak on the steps, and then the figure carried in.

Sir Duncan was roused up from his bed, and came in a surprisingly short time. In a moment he was at work, and in a moment had comfort for the agitated girl.

"A stroke," he said, "but a desperate hard one. I told her of this again and again. You see she breathes. We may do something yet." And with the usual fiery remedies he laboured hard; and before morning Lady Margaret was alive again.

Bowman had been telegraphed for. With the day other physicians came and gathered round her. Diana—infinately relieved when they told her that all danger was gone, but that "we must be most careful"—saw now quite another Lady Margaret sitting up there before her; one who seemed as though some ruins had fallen on and crushed her. There was another face, bloodless, and altered in shape; and she was almost scared to see how the mouth hung down at one corner, and what a dull, stony stare came into the eyes at times.

Under such a trial there was but one course, Sir Duncan said,—to go abroad and "drink waters," and at once, without a second's delay. So had ended what might be called the fourth act of Lady Margaret's life: the next would languish through, without interest or business. Indeed, it was full time that the curtain should come down. She could now only speak in strange indistinctness; her images of "the odious Mantower" and her rivalry had passed away; the great ducal ball, where that enemy had flourished, was over, and was as nothing; all was changed. The mansion was being given up hurriedly; great trunks were in the hall; "Jeames" had received notice; the argosy and tall horses had gone home. Diana, sitting up half the nights, the most tender and solicitous of nurses, would have gone anywhere with her to continue those offices of devotion. But that could not

be; she could not be away from her suit. A hired nurse had come into office; this trained service was indispensable. As many friends said, "God help poor Bowman!" who never did a thing for himself in his life.

There, however, was to be left our Diana, without a substantial female friend to turn to. To whom could she go? There she was to be, in that hired house, which she had taken, a dismal prospect before her, with coming dangers and a new world. Trials and troubles seemed to be crowding on her. At last it was the night of the departure of the Bowmans, and it had grown nearly dark. She was sitting with the helpless lady upstairs, when word was brought that Captain Lugard was below. He had been away with his regiment.

"Diana," he said eagerly, "I only heard two days ago; but they would not let me go. I have come the moment I could get free. What are these people going to do with you? Surely not leaving you here?"

"They must go," said Diana. "Poor Lady Margaret dare not stay."

"But what is to become of you? My God! have they not thought of that? Do they mean to cast you off, now that they have no more use for you? Have you thought of yourself, dear Diana?"

Diana looked at him, a little scared. She had not thought of this; she was not selfish.

"I must stay here, of course," she said.

"You! a young girl; impossible! No; I have thought of it—very anxiously too. You *must come to me*—to us—your old friend, that has your interest at heart."

"Oh no!" said she, "that could not be."

"Could not be!" said he; "perhaps so. But where will you go, Diana? What is to become of you? Think of your enemies; think of the net that is gathering about you, a young girl, alone, without any friends. Ah, you must think of this. With us you will have your old Kitty—Kitty Crowder."

This struck Diana.

"Indeed, I am very unfortunate," she said, a little



helplessly; "and I don't know what to do. But you said *enemies*. I have done nothing to any one that I know of."

"Think; just think, then. Is there no one that hates me, and hates you?"

"Robert Bligh? Oh, he would not harm me. I am sure at this moment if he knew—"

"Will nothing convince you?" said Lugard, impatiently. "But, thank Heaven! we have the proofs at last. Page came back last night, and has traced all. He will be here in a few minutes, and you shall know from his own lips. There!"

There was a step on the stair, and Mr. Page entered. He greeted Diana with his old air of lowly subservience.

"Now, Page," said Lugard impatiently, "you are just in time. Tell what you have found out, and speak plainly."

"I always do," said the other, coldly, "on business matters. I shall not trouble Miss Gay with details unless she wishes it; but if she will allow me to summarise the matter in a sentence or two"—

"Yes; tell me quick. Is it good or bad!"

"It is satisfactory, as far as it is certain and can be depended on. I have all the papers here, chapter and verse, page and line; and it comes to this—to what I thought."

"And to what I thought, and what I said all along," said Lugard. "Allow me, please. It comes to this, I say; whether it be a conspiracy, whether there is any case or not, the whole has been got up by the Bligh family."

"What?" said Diana, timidly. "Oh, no! Surely not. But have you proof?"

"As I live, yes; indeed, it is notorious at Boulogne. It was not difficult to find. Mrs. Bligh has been there months, hunting up this, hunting up that. She has succeeded so far. Her son—"

"No; not Robert?"

"Yes; I met him in the packet coming back. I sup-

pose, after having arranged his work. The mother and he had been settling their plans together. It was she who found out this girl in a convent; indeed, she makes no secret of it. But I have all the proofs."

"Oh, how cruel, how wicked!" cried Diana; "and I never injured them."

That night, as Diana was watching beside Lady Margaret, the picture of herself in her desertion and desolation came back upon her very forcibly. She shrank from it with a sort of terror. Above all, she was now filled with a warm resentment and indignation against the mother and son who could be thus vindictive. She felt her spirit rise, and was ready to meet their attacks as boldly. Before the next evening she had agreed to accept the asylum which her old, kind, and true friends had offered to her; for she saw at last how sensible was Lugard, and how truly he had divined what she had never seen herself.

It did look suspicious, all but convincing. Mr. Page returning home from Boulogne, had actually met Robert Bligh on the deck of the packet, and recognised at once so well-known and "rising" a junior.





## CHAPTER III.

### A BONE OF A FAMILY SKELETON.



FTER Robert's last interview with Diana, he had gone home to a great brief, which was ready waiting to absorb, and even to devour him. But he could not shut out what *would* come between his eyes and his papers—the strange discovery he had made that day. All through the fluttering leaves of Cox and Malagrida (he was for the respondents, and would have to open their case before the Vice-Chancellor the following day), he was pursued by this disturbing notion. Pity, sorrow—and perhaps the old love, which he could not extinguish so readily as he imagined—that terrible and sudden reverse for one so young, so innocent, so full of hope and beauty, and enjoyment of all the pleasant things of the world—quite took hold of him, and kept him in a reverie, thrusting out the obtrusive “respondent” Malagrida, and by midnight scarcely “a single fact” had been taken in. All that he had heard came floating between his mind and it, and distracted his attention. He had a strange and secret conviction that what had been charged was quite true—that Mrs. Bligh had some part in this surprising turn. Her awful and mysterious allusions to punishment, her invocations of vengeance on Diana's head, now recurred to him. He knew how firm of purpose, how unrelenting even, she

was ; and he recalled that, when he had asked about the object of her visit to Boulogne, she had answered bluntly and curtly, "that she had a good reason for going there." Then came a crush of business, increasing with him every day, and he had little time to think or speculate. He had a certain instinct—such as never failed him in doubtful cases—that there was something real and substantial at the bottom of this suit with which poor Diana was menaced. The skilled lawyer, at the first glance, often feels such an inspiration, which rarely misleads. But still it was only too likely that Mrs. Bligh would not be checked by any consideration which stood in the way of her purpose. He had clear and certain recollections of little passages in old days of his boyhood ; and though he loved and respected her, he knew her character and her iron purpose in such matters as well as though she were a witness and in the box under his treatment.

The evening mail had been just brought in to him, generally half-a-dozen letters strong. The morning one was by far the heavier. There was one letter on thin post-paper, and covered over with the parti-coloured blue and orange stamps and smirched marks which betray the foreign letter. It was from Mrs. Bligh : he opened it eagerly, for it came *apropos*.

"MY DEAR CHILD,"—it ran,—“you have heard by this time of what has overtaken her. Was I a true prophet ? I told you vengeance would overtake her, and it has. Nor do you imagine, nor let her and *her friends* persuade you, that it is a mere idle menace—a thing that will blow over, or that will prove to be a low trumped-up matter to extort money. She may tell her friends so, and they will tell her ; but it is nothing of the kind, *as I know*, and as the world will know by and by.”

Robert Bligh did not read any more ; this convinced him. Within half an hour his resolution had been taken. He had sent Malagrida back to his solicitor, naming a friend who was ready to take it up ; and by the first con-

tinental train next morning was hurrying down to Folkestone. By the afternoon he was gliding into the bright and theatrical port of Boulogne, looking at its gay colours and unfamiliar faces.

The gossiping exiles of that pleasant place of refuge, the lively natives and good-natured shopkeepers, had long noticed—the former with an exaggerated curiosity, the latter with the polite toleration of citizens of the world—the austere and ascetic-looking female who had come to live among them for a short while, and who was restlessly going about making some mysterious inquiries. The English expatriated at first could not make her out, and offered their usual advances; but when her hostile manner and cold *accueil* had firmly repelled them, became (also as usual) her determined foes. Many were the circumstantial stories sent round: she had fled from her creditors—her daughter had run away with a music-master, “an awful business”—with more ingenious fables. The French, as we said, were utterly incurious; but noticing that she was a good deal with a certain aged abbé, who lived *en retraite*, as it were, in a modest lodging in the *haute ville*, quietly set her down as a *devote enragée*, who had been in youth and in middle age equally “enraged” for pleasure, and was now only taking the usual French course.

Devotion at Boulogne was the amusement of old age, as pleasure had been of youth and maturity. Every day had its season according to this philosophic people, who were content with quiet solutions of things, and did not seek to penetrate deep for mysterious secrets. It was presently known that the stranger had gone away to Amiens, and that she had returned; but some (English) curiosity was deservedly excited when old Captain Filby reported that he had seen Dubosc—the retired police-officer—pay her a visit. This state of observation continued for some weeks, until the handsome Mrs. Fazakerly and her husband arrived and began “to dash out,” as it was called, and all the broken down “pack” harked away on that scent, and to a new cry. Another month

went by, and it was all forgotten ; until the same Captain Filby told one evening, at the Club, that he was sure old "Bonaparte's" son had arrived—such was the disrespectful name he had given the lady, from her peculiar cast of features—as he had overheard him give that name to the passport-fellow in the office.

Mrs. Bligh was sitting in one of the bright and cheerful rooms that give on the hill, which is called the Grande Rue, when a native maid entered with news that there was a gentleman below.

Mrs. Bligh was never startled : she did not start when he entered, though a faint tinge of colour came into her grim cold cheeks. She welcomed him as though they had parted, not indeed the day before, but perhaps the week before ; there was that measure of warmth in her reception. But Robert fancied he saw a sort of distrust or inquiring challenge in her face, as who should say, "Why have you come ? what is it brings you ?"

They sat down together, mother and son, and he talked of what he knew would please and interest her—his own prospects and success. The dinner came ; and when the maid had gone he came at once gravely to the subject he was full of. Almost at once, and even before he began, her manner changed : she composed herself to a stiff and hostile attitude.

"This dreadful news," he said, "about poor Diana—"

She interrupted him. "Yes, got my letter ? Yes ! dreadful for her, if you will."

"Dreadful for all who have an interest in a poor, helpless, friendless child."

"I see—not cured yet. You have seen her, I suppose, since she learned this ?"

"Yes, for a short time."

"Of course. And I suppose she went through her old course of histrionic tricks—her tears and helplessness ? She can do all that business well."

"On the contrary, mother, I must tell you, she gave me no such reception ; but made the most cruel charges—which, Heaven knows, I do not deserve."

Scorn and rage came into Mrs. Bligh's face. "And she dares to keep this up still—the artful, designing, ill-conditioned creature! But she shall be brought down; and brought low. I tell you so, Robert. For these years of insult and insolence, which she thinks all sport and innocence, she shall soon atone; and, if we wish it, we can make her come grovelling to our knees, Robert, to beg mercy. I promise you *that*, Robert—I, your mother—and I never yet promised what I did not perform!"

There was a silence. Robert made a motion to speak, but restrained himself. He looked at her doubtfully.

"This is what I have always deprecated," he said. "I want no vengeance and no punishment; besides, what can we do? This will turn out a mere vain menace; one of those schemes to get money to which many families have been exposed."

His heart misgave him later for thus trying diplomacy with her; but he wished to know more. She was so eager, that she thought the chance of failure was the only thing that stood in the way of his adhesion. She began at once.

"Tell me first about her—what she said, what she dared to say. Were there no signs of repentance or grace—no promise of the old love?"

"My dear mother, we have done with that long ago."

"Then I tell her she may have done with it, but not with the consequences. You and I shall live to see her begging yet; coming to you a reduced girl, asking you to get her into some decent family as a governess, to earn her bread. She will think of the old love then; but it will do her no good. Never fear, Robert; she will rue that day yet."

"How do you know all this?" he said abruptly.

"Ah, Robert, what have I come here for? What have I been doing these six weeks past? What have I been hunting up night and day—dreaming of? What have I despaired of finding, but have found at last? I found it though."

"What, mother?"

"Listen," she said, "Robert. Draw in your chair close. You shall know the whole; what it has cost me so much trouble day and night to make out."

"No, mother, I do not want to know. I can have nothing to do with this; and warned you that I could not."

"Folly!" she said, contemptuously. "But you shall; you must see what a net I have woven about her, and she shall never break through it."

Robert Bligh—faintly protesting—then had to listen; for he felt, or at least this seemed to be his excuse, that he must save her from herself. Curiosity also was at work. This was the story she told him.







## CHAPTER IV.

### ▲ PIECE OF FAMILY HISTORY.

**S**OME five-and-thirty years before, the colonists found among them a fair and good-looking young man, with a pleasant laugh and a hearty, careless manner, who, in a very short time, grew to be liked by a good many. His name was Burgess; and as he seemed to have some money, and spent it freely in entertaining friends, he was considered delightful. No one thought of asking who Mr. Burgess was, from whence he came, or why he stayed there,—questions tacitly avoided in the place, unless a man had become generally odious, and there was an object in putting him down. Then malignity stopped at nothing; and when the truth could not be found, falsehood and invention did just as well.

Young Captain Burgess soon came to be one of the “leaders” of the society there, such as it was, and had soon commended himself to the young ladies of the place. His free, joyous manners were found delightful, and his forwardness not impudence or familiarity, as they would have appeared in some one less gifted. He presently became a very wild young man, and soon the rumour went abroad of scrapes and riots and foolish escapades, at which the English chaplain used to shake his head with pity.

The little Boulogne theatre led a sort of stagnant dramatic existence, whose players held much the same relation to other places as the audience did to the town itself, and who were thus, as it were, exiled from their native dramatic country. The French found their way there, and were amused; but the English were very contemptuous in their estimation of the performances, and were perpetually and unfairly comparing it with "the King's Theatre" at home or Covent Garden. Young Burgess sometimes strolled in,—once or twice "got up a row," and was dragged out ferociously by the gendarmes.

At last it was known that the "administration" had engaged a dancer,—tenth-rate, perhaps, but still with good looks,—"the Duval," as she was called; and this quickened the languid curiosity of the English. She was pronounced by those judges "very fair on the whole;" and was, indeed, bold enough in her generation. Mr. Burgess was soon found to be one of her most ardent admirers, going every night, applauding noisily, to the disgust of the French, throwing bouquets, and fairly getting into a fresh quarrel with some man who had shown signs of disapprobation. He was seen on the Port walking with this ballerina, and scandalised the not-easily-scandalised company of the place. She was a bold, painted, flaring creature; but, whatever was the secret, she had made a conquest of the young Englishman; and very soon, when her engagement was over, a most delicious morsel of news, more toothsome than the *sucre d'orge* to be bought at the corner shop, was sucked and enjoyed for many days. Captain Filby discovered that "the poor fool" *had actually married the girl*. The amazement may be conceived. The conventionally "happy pair" had gone away, her engagement having terminated, to some other town, and were not heard of again for a very long time.

Now Mrs. Bligh takes up the story, and shall tell the rest herself.

"I was at this time, Robert, in London, not yet married, and my greatest friend in the world, though she was many years older, was Laura Gay, one of the most reso-

lute, unflinching women in the world, with a will and purpose worth that of a dozen men. It was she who did *all* for those Gays, and but for that gallant working creature, who laid her whole soul and mind to this one end, of raising up the family from the difficulties in which they were steeped, that girl, who now behaves with all this pride and insolence to you, would have been a pauper. Laura's husband was a poor weak creature, with no more brains than a monkey, and she ruled him for his own advantage. Gradually the estate got cleared; the old load of building-debt was paid off. She got him back to their old place in the country, and she actually had things in train to get an old baronetcy revived; for she was the proudest creature, and looked to position as the first thing; and though she was not young, had the most surprising influence over political men.

"Often she talked to me over these schemes of hers. 'If I had only materials!' she would say; 'but what can I do with *him*? Her eldest son, who was in the army, was a wild scapegrace,—very delicate in appearance, but in reality strong; she often talked with me over him, and I could see all her thoughts turned to her second sensible and steady son. 'He cannot live,' she would say;—'I know he will drink himself to death. Perhaps it will be the best for himself in the end; for if he ever comes into the property, he will waste and ruin everything. He has no head, no wits; he does not like me, and I do not like him; and it would be a mercy.'

"Suddenly, one day, news arrived from the colonel of the regiment of a serious scandal—that young Gay had 'broken out,' had behaved in the most outrageous way, had set his colonel at defiance, and finally had gone off, leaving regiment, connections, &c., without leave or notice. No one knew what had become of him. The news was in all the papers, to her rage and mortification; the disgrace and publicity wrung her very heart. Yet I think she felt some comfort when she heard he had gone to the colonies—to the backwoods; for she was sure he would never be heard of again. I know what you are

thinking of, Robert—how like she was in some things to *your* mother; and so she was: and that was one reason of our friendship.

“For some years he never was heard of, and this girl’s father was now being brought up as the heir. But one day she came rushing to me with a letter. ‘I knew it—I knew it!’ she said. ‘It was too great a blessing for me. I have had none all through my weary life.’ She showed me the letter. It was from Boulogne—from him—saying that he was ill and *deserted*, imploring her to come to him, and that he had not long to live. She begged of me, if I would do her a service, to go with her; and I agreed.

“It was a weary journey, and all along the road I was surprised at her agitation; and she kept repeating the words of the letter: ‘Ill and *deserted*—ill and *deserted*! If he has done that—my God, if he should have done *that*! But he could not be so base and wicked!’”

“When we arrived, we found our way to a mean lodging, and asked for him, as he had told us, by the name of Burgess. As we entered the room, the first object we saw was a sickly-looking little girl, of about five years old, playing about the floor. Then Mrs. Gay gave a cry. The doctor came in nearly at the same time, and told her that he had very little hope.

“She went in and saw her son, and stayed nearly an hour. She told me scarcely anything, except she said that the little girl was the daughter of some unfortunate married lady whom this scapegrace had run off with. I said nothing; but I was as shrewd and far-seeing as she was, and I constructed my own theory. That theory I long thought over afterwards; and a few inquiries made it complete and perfect. In fact, I rather resented that she did not put confidence in me.

“In a few days he died, and she was with him to the last. The very next morning I missed the little girl; and when I asked Laura Gay about it, she said that they had found out the relations, who had at last sent and agreed to take charge of her. They were not wealthy, and she,

'as usual,' she said, had been obliged to agree to make them some allowance. Again, I had my own theory and my own conclusion; and I had also made my own inquiries, and learned that 'the married lady' was a dancer, and that she had gone off not long before with a French officer.

"Thus we settled everything happily, and returned home; and that—that girl's father"—Mrs. Bligh never could call her Diana—"became the heir of Gay Court. From that time everything prospered. Laura made a great match for him, getting him sixty thousand pounds and some interest, cleared the estate, and, had she lived, would have recovered the old baronetcy—the darling object of all her hopes. These schemes became her very life itself; but I noticed a great change in her, as she grew every hour more stern, and iron-bound, and pitiless. Something like *me*, Robert, you will say; and indeed, she taught me much; and if I had not been with *her*, perhaps I had been a different character. I often asked her about that time, and the little girl; what had become of her: but Laura Gay always answered me with a contemptuous laugh. 'The low impostors! I am only sorry I paid them any money. I suppose she is keeping a café, or dancing at a franc a-night, like her wretched mother. Why do you want to know?' I did not tell her why I wanted to know, because I had suspicions of my own. But when that girl was growing up, and Laura had died—just, too, as she was so near the baronetcy—my ambitious schemes for you, dear Robert, were ripening, and I kept it by me as a useful weapon. What gift is there, after all, like that of discreet silence—of not speaking until the proper moment has arrived?"

"And you knew all this, mother," said he, with a shocked look, "and said nothing? Allowed this dreadful injustice to go on for years?"

"Well, I repair it now," said she calmly, "late as it is. As you say, a frightful wrong. But the true heir is found at last, and shall be restored; the false intruder, whose pride nothing but adversity can bring down, shall be cast

out; that cold, cruel girl shall descend to her proper station—to beggary and pauperism, and—serve her right.”

Robert started.

“I do not believe this. This looks like some scheme that has been contrived.”

“You are consistent indeed,” she said coldly, “for a lawyer. But no matter.”

“I mean, mother, they have imposed on you, or your anger against her has helped to impose on you. Do not think I care for her; but it is for yourself—to save you from a remorse that will embitter one part of your life.”

“Most considerate!” said she, her face every moment darkening. “You may spare me that conventional advice; I have heard it before. But this all points to something; speak out, and let me understand you. Do you mean to say that you will oppose me in this business? is that your meaning?”

“Oppose you? no. But, as I said, we should inquire—see that there is no fraud. That is my duty. I must see to that, as I am bound—whatever you think. Why did you meddle with it! Oh mother! Diana was right, then, when she said that this blow came from us. And he—that Lugard—was only right too.”

Mrs. Bligh darted a look of scorn and anger at him.

“What do you mean by these words to me? I tell you I would *wish* her to know it came from us. I am proud of it; and shall take care the world knows it comes from us. There!”

“It shall not come from me, mother,” said Robert, in a low voice. “I could not lend myself to such a course. No, nor must you.”

Again her face contracted.

“Nor must I! What is this? Is this the news you have come over to tell your mother? What does it mean? Speak out, or—Oh, I see! you have paid this visit in *her* interest?”

“No,” he said; “but I confess I suspected this, and I have come to save you from a terrible infatuation of which you would repent all your life.”

"My *long* life!" she said bitterly; "and which you shall have the glory of shortening, you cruel, ungrateful son, you! for whom I have given my heart's blood. But don't dare to come in my way, or give me lectures; go back to your courts as you came, and God forgive you your want of heart."

"I have much to be forgiven," he said. "But it is for your sake I speak in this way; not for myself, indeed. I know all you have done for me—how you have sacrificed your life for me; and as you have done this also in my interest, as you think it, surely I may ask you, in the name of Heaven and of all your love for me, to give it up."

"Go away, then; go back!" she said in a trembling voice, and pointing to the door with a long and trembling finger; "go back. At least leave my room; I do not want you here—I have my own purposes. Bless the Being that made you that you do not take something worse with you, that will cleave to you all the days of your life."

She drew herself up—tall, grim, an awful image of terror. Some such image came back to him from his old childish days, when she had so appeared to him; something of the old terror even came back to him, and mechanically he put out his hands imploringly to deprecate her wrath. She drew back as if she had trodden on some reptile.

"It is too late; nothing you can do will atone for *this*. Take your part, and let me take mine; unless—unless you go on your knees there, and swear that you will go back to London at once, and not move a finger."

"No. I could not," said Robert.

"Why do you stay, then?" she said frantically. "Am I not to have the ordinary privilege of being alone when I wish it? Leave me! or must I ring?"

There was a hard steel edge in her voice that seemed to cut and gash as she spoke, a cold savage glare in her eye which seemed to pierce him. All his court readiness

forsook him ; he wished to speak, but could not. As he stood faltering, she said, "Then I must go, I see !" and she swept from the room.

He often recalled her last look of scorn and concentrated hatred, as it seemed to him ; but he thought her old affection would triumph, and that he had only to return in the morning and he would find the old affection and gentleness still at his service.

When he did come back, repentant certainly, he was told that she was gone away—whither they could not tell him. He came away sadly, yet still saying to himself, "I could not do otherwise ; and she will thank me afterwards, I know, for saving her from a great sense of remorse."

On board the packet for England was the usual crowd of tourists and business-men. The day was fine. Robert Bligh walked about the deck scarcely noticing the strange faces. Someone attracted his attention by an obsequious bow. He recalled that face as a professional one, the face of one belonging to the "lower branch" of the profession. He recollected that the name was Page.







## CHAPTER V.

### MORTIFICATION.

**L**ADY MARGARET BOWMAN had gone, as the *Morning Flush* had taken care to advise the public, to a watering place on the Continent. This simple piece of information, which, curious to say, did not interest any of Lady Margaret's *friends*, but did a great many who had never seen her, and who followed the movements of august people with the greatest zest,—this news became, under the magic of *Flush* treatment, as impressive as a state paper: "We regret to learn that, owing to the imperative advice of her family physician, Lady Margaret Bowman has been obliged to leave town, to repair to the waters of Badentaul. It is hoped that her ladyship will be restored to health and strength by the sanitary agency of that celebrated curative medium. Miss Gay, of Gay Court, is sojourning at Folkestone." An extract also from the lively *Regent Street Chronicle* may be found interesting. That capital journal always had some sort of hot muffin ready every night, something fresh, good and appetising. The other papers had to bake and re-bake. The evidence for the plaintiff, in the impending ejectment case, had been printed for the convenience of counsel, and the omnipotent *Chronicle* had contrived to get hold of a copy. It gave a morsel or two.

"The elements are dramatic enough," said the *Chronicle*. "What could be more so than the story of the Sœur Madeleine, belonging to a convent of grey sisters, near Amiens? Her story was taken before a commission; Mr. Staveley, Q.C., and two of his brethren—finding themselves, we daresay for the first time, within the enclosure of a convent. We have no doubt the learned gentlemen behaved with all the gravity becoming their profession. This lady, it seems, is nearly eighty, and tells us a little history that we would commend to Mr. Philip Wattson for the first act of his next French drama at the Adelphi. She remembers a winter evening, a vast number of years ago, and an English lady coming in a post-chaise, and speaking French not very intelligibly, or, as the sister says naïvely, *à l'Anglaise*. She brought a little girl, whom she wished the community to bring up, and if possible convert into a nun; and said that a small capital, representing some thirty pounds a year interest, was already in Mr. Marx's hands, a local Amiens banker. She would return every year to see her charge. It was of course in accordance with the canons of dramatic propriety that the mysterious English lady never should return. The local banker, however, was a very satisfactory substitute. All this we commend to Mr. Philip Wattson aforesaid as a tolerable Prologue—as it is the fashion to style a first act—for his 'Lost Child,' or whatever else he may choose to call his piece.

"But now steps in another lady, whose name for the present we shall do no more than indicate obscurely, after the fashion of our contemporaries, describing her as one intimately connected with a certain rising barrister of the outer bar, who lately unseated on petition a gallant officer who represented the little borough of C—. This lady has a foreign story to tell also, but which we must hold over for the present."

That story was held over altogether, for the solicitor for the plaintiff, in the twinkling of an eye, made an application for an injunction to restrain further publica-

tion, and succeeded, and, to use his own expression, "salted" the lively journal in costs.

Still, as the depositions were so voluminous, Mr. Page found his account in applications for time, motions, and so forth. Parties in the great suits are like the old line-of-battle ships, which have to be slowly towed into their place before action begins—a long business of warping, hauling, and what not. It would take many months before all was ready for the first gun.

Diana had not forgotten the hint of her kind friend Sir John. As soon as was practicable, she got a little sketch of her case and of its strong points from her solicitor, and tripped away quietly one morning to the great man's house. As the little face looked out from the cab, the mansion had itself an awful, attorney-general sort of air; and as the little figure got out timorously, Lady Jane herself happened to look from the window, and was not a little scornful to her friends on the score of this visit. No lady likes such appointments.

Sir John received Diana from behind a barricade of papers, piled up like sandbags in a battery; laid aside the tremendous papers in the case of the seizure of the *William Simpson* by the Argentine Republic, and on which he was to give the Government an opinion, and welcomed "his little client" with great warmth and good nature. He made her sit down beside him in a large "consulting-chair," as though he were a doctor, and a legal one. It was almost a picture to see this grave gentleman with Diana at his knee, her eyes on his as he read.

When he had done, he said anxiously, "You know, my dear child, things in our profession are very uncertain; and what with our pig-headed juries,—and lawyers also with pig-heads,—and our dull judges, and the mistakes of counsel, you see, everything is so uncertain. Therefore I am always for arranging or compromising. What do you think?"

"Oh, then you think that there is no hope?" said Diana piteously. "I see that is the meaning of all this."

"Not at all," said he, "but it is the uncertainty;

and these sort of cases are more uncertain than any other. Send your solicitor to me ; I have so much on my hands now in the House and elsewhere, that really—however, I shall see about *that*. Now, my dear, you must leave me ; you can't imagine all the work on this poor head."

That evening she had a note from Mr. Page, saying he had seen the Attorney-General, and had given him a brief in the case. Diana knew what this meant, and wrote a deeply grateful letter to her kind, good friend. But she was now to have other little trials and mortifications. As the time wore on, and wore on slowly, Diana was to learn a little about the true character of the world she had once thought so charming.

The young Lord Patmore would come at first pretty often, visits she was inclined to set down to a generous sympathy and interest ; but presently it became apparent that curiosity had a great deal to do with his attention. He put many questions, and would sit restlessly and pettishly as she answered him ; and, not without skill, even cross-examined the unconscious little lady on the prospects of the case. She, with a sort of *épanchement* quite natural to her, told him the whole truth, rather overcolouring it in her wish for generous comfort.

"Indeed, I am sure we can only expect the worst ; and indeed I wish it was all over, and the suspense ended. It is making me wretched."

"But, good gracious," said Lord Patmore, fretfully, "have you got no one to tell you anything—none of those lawyer fellows ? that man that used to be with you—what's his name—Bligh ?"

"I would not ask him !" said Diana, drawing herself up and overstating an imaginary slight with scorn. "He is my enemy. But they have taken the opinion of one of the best counsel,—and I don't understand things well,—but he seems to be very doubtful."

"Seems to be very doubtful ?" said he, starting up. "God bless us ! I thought it was all plain sailing—an imposture, and all that ?"

"I wish it were," said Diana, sadly; "or if it be not, why should I wish to keep the rightful people out of their own? But it is very hard on me, brought up to all this, and who have not learned to do anything for myself."

The young lord expressed no sympathy, but kept drumming with his foot on the ground.

"I'm sure," he said, "it's most unpleasant and painful; and really I don't know what to say. Everybody is talking of it, and asking *me*. I am sure I don't know what I can tell them."

"It is very dismal," said Diana, still reflectively; "but I have found every one very kind; much more than I expected. I can never say that the world is hollow again."

"Oh, that's all very well," he said impatiently, "in the novels and that sort of place; but romance is one thing. I wasn't brought up to romance. My guardians and all that will be savage. I never even dreamt of this, and nobody did; and I am sure it is very strange altogether."

Diana was now looking at him with wonder, and not a little scorn. Now at last she understood. She was getting rough lessons every hour, under these unmeaning phrases and this pettish circumlocution. She was not angry; but still she felt a pang, for she had thought that this foolish butterfly, with all his folly and nonsense, was redeemed by his attachment to her. Indeed, this was the redeeming point of all the hollow world, their love and good-nature to *her*. Many others, in a position like hers, cannot bring themselves to believe in anything but good of a world which is kind to them.

That night Lord Patmore received a letter from Diana, which cost her very little to write, though it seemed a tragic enough occasion; a person of the world, too, would have called it clever in its way.

"DEAR LORD PATMORE,"—it ran—"after you went away to-day I thought over very seriously what you had said, and also what your manner seemed to convey. I *do* feel that things have changed a good deal since you first paid me the compliment of giving me your regard.

I am not exactly in the same position now, and we do not know what may happen. You will recollect that when you first spoke to me, and honoured me with so flattering a proposal, it was agreed that the matter should stand over till the end of the season. That has now come, and I think you will say it would be for the best that we should remain as we were a year ago. I am sure you think with me. In any case it might hardly have suited ; and it is much better to find this out before it be too late. I hope you will be very happy in whatever course of life you may adopt, and with whomsoever you choose ; and believe me, your well-wisher, &c.,

“ DIANA GAY.”

The young lord read this document with infinite relief.

“ She is noble ! ” he said to his friend ; “ it all came from herself. Nothing could be more handsome. She has the head of a man, and sees the whole situation. Such delicacy ! she saw that it could not be. I declare solemnly there isn’t a girl in town I would prefer to her—that is, if it was open to me to do it. I wish to Heaven it was, and that there was no such thing as money—or I mean that there was money enough for every one.”

However, he was much relieved, though presently the reaction came, and he began to think that after all she might win the suit. And then Diana herself, after the first little shock, was as pleased ; for the end of the season, when she was to give her decision, or rather announce her acceptance, was always before her, like some heavy trial. Now she was free ; yet still she was mortified.

“ I thought he liked me,” she said bitterly. “ I suppose this is the whole secret of all their devotion ; I thought they were coming so much after me, for myself alone.” A rueful discovery which so many have made long before Diana’s time.



## CHAPTER VI.

### A NEW LIFE.

**W**HEN Diana now thought of her old friend Robert Bligh, it was with a sense of regret and indignation. How could he be so unkind, so cruel and unworthy? As Richard said, who was never weary of inveighing against him with a savage and bitter earnestness, "it was mean and petty; it was like the spite of a school-girl. My dear Diana, that fellow hates you nearly as much as he hates me; and depend on it, this is but the beginning of his enmity."

She had, however, one friend left, who was in distress like herself; who had been cruelly persecuted by fortune, but who through all had never changed to her, and who had now come forward so nobly to offer her an asylum.

When Diana's old friend, Kitty Crowder, now Mrs. Richard Lugard, was told of the new arrangement, she did not receive the news with any great enthusiasm. Her husband announced it with triumph.

"Kitty," said her husband scornfully, "is getting as insensible as some of those sea-plants. She will be a jelly-fish by-and-by. She cares for nothing,—is dead to the world, and all that; so you mustn't mind her. It's only her manner to me and to every one."

Kitty laughed a little harshly.

"But what is *your* manner to me? Something between yours to your horse and to your man-servant."

"Polite always!" cried Mr. Lugard; "even elegantly so."

"That is my way," replied Mrs. Lugard very promptly, and left the room.

Diana looked after her wondering.

"There, you see what you have to expect," said Richard.

The Lugards' house was handsome and well furnished, though not very large, and situated in the best quarter. Richard, with something of his old elation restored, went about busily, making many extra little purchases and decorations to set it off for their guest. He had put out of sight his recent mortification with the bit of comfort, "Never mind; there will be a dissolution one of these days; and if I sell the coat off my back, I'll fight him to the last."

He was never weary of descanting to Diana on the way he had been treated, and the march that fellow had stolen upon him. But, as he said, all in good time. His friends meantime wondered how "poor Dick" contrived to keep his head above water, or keep the Jews off. Some mysterious arrangement had been made, and he had *not* been obliged to sell his commission, which many an experienced seer had prophesied he must have been obliged to do. But there were rumours also that the regiment was going to India sooner than had been expected,—a piece of news which Lugard often dwelt on bitterly and contemptuously to Diana, as he walked up and down his drawing-room.

"Going to India!" he said; "this is the fine way in which they manage things in this country of ours. A man with anything like genius or ordinary ability might as well go to the west coast of Africa; I see no difference. It's scandalous to be treating English soldiers, and gentlemen of birth too, in such a way; sending a man to certain death and ill-health and misery. *I'll* not go if they do. They talk of fighting Beloochees and Sikhs; I should hope we were born for better things than *that*."

Diana's old friend Kitty received the new guest with that strange manner which now seemed habitual—a passive indifference to all that was going on around her.



It not a little disturbed and embarrassed Diana, who said, in her own affectionate way, "I know, dearest Kitty, this is fretting you, and I begin to be afraid——"

Kitty interrupted her impatiently.

"Afraid of what? Of *me*? because I am not enthusiastic and full of rapture because you have come here? I tell you I am not, because I have lost all taste for everything, and care for nothing now. I have forgotten to be excited about anything."

"But if I thought——" said Diana, who always had a sore difficulty in devising what she had to say that should be fitting and appropriate,—a lamentable deficiency, she thought, but common to many more with her. After a pause she said, not a little hurt, "Oh, I am afraid, Kitty, that I should not have—I see you do not wish it."

Kitty rose impatiently.

"Why do you worry me?" she said; "you don't know what I suffer, and I am not accountable for what I say. Go, then, if you will; and what a splendid scene we shall have here afterwards!" And Mrs. Lugard laughed to herself very scornfully. "I have got very brusque and altered, Diana, my old friend, and have to bear, Oh *so* much! you will see presently how much."

To Diana, thinking over these curious speeches, the truth at last presented itself.

"Poor, poor Kitty!" she thought. "*Now* I see what she means. I *knew* they never would understand each other; but that cannot be helped now. I am *sure* I could manage it,—at least, I will try."

What "*she saw now*" was a splendid task set before her, as though she was called to a missionary work—to make these two old friends, whom she liked, understand each other *through her*! She would be the new link. Kitty, she saw, worshipped him; and Kitty did not know how to take his bold and too impetuous and impatient character, which required some skill. As Miss Gay thought of this very often, and sometimes before her glass, the pretty face she saw gazing seemed to say, "Ah, little wayward rogue! you have a foolish, irresistible way

with you, which gets for you anything you wish, or lay yourself out for."

Of course she owned her defects; she was not as wise as those clever, long-headed women "who knew the world,"—as that poor dear Lady Margaret, about whom Dr. Spindler, of the German Bath, used to write to her in such awfully unintelligible English. But she had no humiliation in this deficiency; and, like most beauties, thought the treasure these possessed far brighter and more valuable than those prosy commodities which are so much vaunted. But from Dr. Spindler, that courtier physician of the watering-places, far off as he was, our Diana was to learn one of those rough lessons about that new science of "knowledge of the world;" and it is certainly a little hard that to such tender scholars the instruction seems always to be conveyed in the most cruel fashion. But it is the penalty of late education.

This foreign practitioner had soon found out that "miladi" had a young and peerless ward, entitled in her own right to vast estates and influence. Her coming would of course presently be looked for; and with every post he sent away a most soliticious bulletin of miladi's health. One morning, however, Sir Joseph Masham, whose liver he was trying to get into something like order, had received his *Regent Street Chronicle*, and read him aloud the extract that has been already shown to the reader. Sir Joseph, whose liver had been troublesome, was in ill-humour that morning, and added his own private convictions on Diana's affairs, which were coloured by his irritation.

"Don't tell me; I know the place well—every acre of it. The thing has been brewing this long time, and I suppose that Gay did his best to stop their mouths during his lifetime. A foolish girl, with no wit in her head; and will be left there a perfect pauper. All must go or nothing."

On this intelligence the German physician, in a very ill humour, at once ceased his correspondence, and even thought he had a claim for compensation for the way he had been taken in. Diana was deeply hurt. In her new life there was not much to cheer her.

Mrs. Lugard was in bad health, "always suffering," as her husband said, impatiently.

"No one could make out what was the matter with her. Can't you say what doctor you would wish to see? two, three, four, if you like. For God's sake do as other people do, and have done with this martyr-business."

"I want no doctor," said Mrs. Lugard, coldly; "I never said I did."

These are merely the words of the scene; but spectators who have unhappily to sit in the stalls, and talk and look on, and see the faces, the action, and the byplay that accompany them, could supply much more.

By this time, however, what had been such a shock had begun to fade in the distance. The coming trial, like all such great ventures, was to take a long time before getting fairly afloat on legal waters. There were so many applications "in chambers" and elsewhere; so much swearing of affidavits, with fresh applications, also "in chambers," for additional time to reply to them,—a foreign witness or two to be examined, for which purpose a commission had "to be sped,"—that at last it seemed to be some distant cloud, which might after all break and pass away with a change of wind. Diana herself began to think it might never come round, and gradually recovered her old enjoyment in the world before her. But all the while it was making slow and certain progress; the case was getting into shape, and, alas, already the beginning, like a small snowball, was being rolled on laboriously by the joint efforts of the attorneys on both sides; and when it presently got to the edge of the hill, would go bounding along of its own momentum. The "speeding" of the commission alone involved an agreeable tourist party, consisting of Mr. Staveley the barrister, a junior counsel from each side, a clerk from ditto, a shorthand-writer, and a sworn interpreter. The party travelled leisurely, received a handsome sum for expenses, and so many guineas a-day each.

From this delay, the public began to rally about the young heiress. They seemed to have been a little hasty.

The "mamas" and young men, not too nicely logical in their distinctions, assumed that "it had gone off," and began to embrace—that is, the mamas—and cluster round Diana. Here was another worldly lesson. Even Lord Patmore, who, to do him all justice, had failed from a sense of what he thought was due to his position and high prospects, and had long since sorely repented, came in sackcloth to Diana. It was at a party, the usual scene for most dramatic incidents in Diana's life. Her two friends were beside her. But *that* was too much, thought Diana; quite too much.

When his lordship began with some apologies for not having called, adding he hoped she would be at home now, and he had had such a time of it, "and all that," Diana found her face colouring. She drew herself up.

"You need not say anything, Lord Patmore," she said; "but I think you very unkind; and I cannot tell you how much I suffered. It was cruel, oh, so cruel!"

The young lord glowed and coloured, and could only falter, "Oh, I vow, Miss Gay,—that is, I couldn't help it at the time,—you know, when I heard all that—"

"And if you had only waited!" went on Diana; "you knew me so little. But you would not have suffered. I knew our relations were altered. But you must not think I am angry now; and I shall never think of it any more."

Diana swept away with not a little pride, and some trembling in her voice.

The culprit was confounded; for he was prepared to condone the past graciously, leaving the future, as it were, open for him. Some of his friends caught a word or two; others at a distance saw Diana's face and bearing, and could decipher all very satisfactorily. So everything being put together, it was understood that "that donkey Patmore had been trying to patch the thing up, and had been gloriously snubbed."

It is surprising how accurate in the main is that shifting, hasty, indifferent, and even ignorant, body the public. Among some of the young men opinions were expressed a little strongly as to "Patmore's behaviour."



## CHAPTER VII.

### THE CLAIMANT.

**T** was one of those shining bright festival days which are so pleasant on the deck of a vessel, when it is known that three-fourths of those about us are all servants of pleasure, with faces full of smiles and of hope. Only a few scattered ones belong to the ranks of business, and have anxious or overcast looks. The blue sea is so smooth, the vessel glides on so gently, the air is so soft, the sky so bright, that steam-voyaging loses all its horrors. Pretty faces covered with smiles, full of spirits, are in rows, as if enjoying the sun in a garden. Who would think that all this should ever change to horrible scenes—Pandemonium rather—the roar of wind and waves, the sweeping deluge, the swoop down into the abyss, the quivering, the creaking, the groans and cries of agony below?

Robert was not one of these pleasure-seekers; he was listless and troubled, and sat himself down in a quite corner, trying to read. The packet was very crowded, and there were not seats for all the passengers. Looking up, he noticed an interesting young girl who seemed to look wistfully for some place to sit down, and he at once offered her his seat. This little civility was received gratefully. She asked him some question about a London street, and then, with a kind of foreign accent, said

she had never been in England before. Bligh told what she wished to know, looked after her luggage, &c., and received her warm thanks.

Bligh had noticed on the deck of the vessel a tall gentleman, with very black locks, and very black moustache, curly hair, and a large hat with a broad timeworn brim. This person walked up and down the deck very much as if he was in the Burlington Arcade, and, as he passed, stared coolly at each one of the lady-passengers. There was a steadiness in this proceeding that made some not a little curious; and many mammas made secret resolutions that when they came to the train they would avoid the carriage which this "odious man" would choose. Bligh had noticed him—he is a not uncommon character on our great lines—and had returned his glances with contempt and hostility; a small indemnity. Such are indeed the vermin of our public society. When, too, Bligh found himself seated beside the young girl, he noticed the peculiar look of this oily dandy, whose complacent confidence in his own attractions would have been amusing had they not been so odious. It seemed to Bligh that this stranger looked on him with resentment as an intruder. The young girl told Bligh that this man had been very forward in what he called "attentions," but which were indeed familiarities, in the French railway-carriage.

"But I have no one with me; and we, who are forced to travel by ourselves, are helpless."

"Well, in this voyage at least," said Bligh promptly, "I hope I may be found of some use."

At the station the "odious man," as might have been anticipated, came pushing and thrusting himself close on the young girl.

"My dear," he said, "I'll get your luggage for you. Leave it all to me."

She only shrank away from him. Bligh meantime had taken the guard aside.

"Put this lady," he said, "into a carriage that is pretty full; and don't let that gentleman in. You see the class of man he is."

The guard nodded.

"I understand, sir. I saw him a minute ago. We have plenty of his sort."

The young girl was put in as directed. Bligh also found a place in the same carriage, and the door was promptly locked.

The "cad, vermin, or reptile," came up in a moment, and was dragging at the handle.

"Here, you!" he cried, "open this, d'ye hear?"

"Can't go in there, sir," said the guard; "this way, please."

"I wish to go in here; you open the door at once."

"Can't do so—plenty of room down here."

The "cad" saw Bligh's face looking out and smiling. He saw, too, the other face looking at him, and enjoying his discomfiture. The guard was called away. One of the party in the carriage had to get out, having forgotten something, and the oiled and oily gentleman came crushing in with his bags, and sat down opposite Bligh, and beside the young girl.

"No one," he said, looking insolently at Bligh, "has a right—guard or *any one* else—to keep me out of a public carriage where there is a seat."

Bligh was not a man to be baffled even in a trifle. He rose up quietly, and left the carriage. In his absence the oiled gentleman "addressed the carriage," but no person in particular.

"We are coming to fine times in this free country; that gent did well to retire, I can tell you."

But Bligh's face was at the door again.

"Will you come down?" he said. "There is a *coupé* in front with some ladies."

And with a light step the young girl had tripped down.

"You have forgotten your things, sir," called out one of the passengers to him.

"Oh, I am coming back, thank you," he said; "and that is my place."

The young lady was put into the *coupé*, and Bligh returned to his carriage, and sat down quietly in front of

the black-haired and oily gentleman, who glared at him and muttered, but who had due awe of public opinion expressed in the looks of the other passengers. Nowhere does that public opinion exert such pressure as in that strict space ; any one who would transgress it is at its mercy.

When the journey was over, the young girl found that Robert had actually paid for this *coupe* himself, to secure her from inconvenience. To her girlish mind it seemed quite a chivalrous deliverance, and that she never could forget it.

When he returned to London and found himself again in his chambers the usual legal arrears were waiting. The briefs sent, in their way the neatest specimen of workmanship known, were lying on his table, like little packages of pure glazed snowy Belfast linens. He looked at them all in succession,—a mere mechanical operation,—but with more curiosity at a vast plethoric bundle, so swelled as to be with difficulty confined within reasonable girth. To his astonishment he read on it, "*GAY v. GAY. Ejectment on the Title : Case for the Plaintiffs. Fee, 50 guineas. The Solicitor-General ; Mr. Hawker, Q.C. ; with you.*" The names of the solicitors were very familiar to him ; a most respectable house, and firm patrons of his. He knew, therefore, it could be no "speculative" case, and that there were "merits." "That poor child," he thought, "it looks very dangerous. She will lose all." Indeed, events seemed to be growing too strong for her. He sent back his brief with a note, saying there were family reasons why he could not act in the business ; and then, his mind being in legal matters quite a mechanical engine, he was soon forgetful of all that had happened, and busily absorbed in his points, as though he had just come home from Court.

In a few days he called at the solicitors', and sent in word that he wished to speak to one of them. Mr. Griffiths came out very speedily, being, indeed, busily at work in his office on this very case. Bligh asked him all about it, and began by telling him it was out of the ques-



tion for him to accept a brief in it. He explained that he always acted for the family, and "advised" on a good deal of their law business. The solicitor quite understood, and took up his little tale.

"In fact," said Bligh, "I should wish to accommodate the matter in some way, if I could. She is a young girl with few friends, and quite helpless; and if the case is at all doubtful, and there were grounds for compromising—"

The solicitor shook his head. "It's all plain sailing; we have everything in black and white. Besides, the people themselves will go through with it. The aunt or guardian is a very determined scheming Frenchwoman. But the young plaintiff seems nice enough. They are the greatest plagues and interrupters of business in the world, fussing here every day, merely to know this and that and t'other."

A clerk here came and said, "Madam Saxe, sir."

"There," said the solicitor; "I knew they were coming. Show them in here."

Bligh rose to go away.

"You may as well stay a moment and see what they are like; and I have another reason, which you will know the moment they come in," said the solicitor; and not being able to resist his curiosity, Bligh took up his hat and remained, a little irresolutely.

A lady with a sharp nose and a very heightened colour, and in her dress of the more vulgar French type, came in, with a young girl following. He recalled his fellow traveller at once. As Bligh looked at her he saw, with something like a thrill, that, though taller, she had a curious, though rather *secret* likeness, to Diana, more in her air and bearing than in features. He noted the sly sort of coquetry with which she glanced at the strange gentleman present, and which he thought was "poor Diana all over."

The bold French lady could speak English tolerably, and established herself comfortably on a chair, as for a long *séance*. She seemed to challenge Bligh haughtily; and in truth the solicitor was not a

little in awe of her. Bligh recollected her manner as being akin to the "business women" of Paris, all smiles and sweetness, save when there is a dispute about half a franc, when sharp and venomous teeth are shown, and claws shoot out at the end of the fingers, and a hissing spitting cat has taken the place of the charming lady.

"This," said the solicitor, "was one of our counsel, the Mr. Bligh I was speaking to you about. Unhappily, he is obliged to return the brief."

Both ladies started and looked at Bligh, the elder one with hostility.

"And why?" she said, suddenly. "There is no discredit, I hope, in our cause."

"Oh dear, no," said Bligh coldly; "there were private reasons."

"He is a friend of the defendant's. It is the etiquette in this country."

"In ours too," said Madame Saxe rudely. "But you have seen our papers; they have been in your possession."

Bligh coloured.

"They lay on my table for a day or two; but I have not seen a line beyond the address."

"Oh, aunt," said the young girl, speaking now for the first time, "we should not think that. I do not suspect it; and I am the person chiefly interested."

The solicitor smiled, and, taking up the brief said, "As madame wishes for proof, here it is. This is my own knot; I know it as well as my own handwriting."

More graciously, then, Madame Saxe made a sort of *amende*; then pulled a paper out of her pocket, and said in a low voice, "I only got this to-day. I read it carefully."

They went over into the window; and Bligh, again about to go away, said with a smile to Eugenie—

"I thank you for acquitting me; though, indeed, we barristers are accustomed to charge each other with all sorts of sins and crimes; that is, *in court*. I am sorry

your first experience of our country should be experience of law."

Eugenie sighed. She was really no more than eighteen ; and that sigh recalled yet more again.

"I do not wish it. I was very happy in my convent. But it is hard to refuse riches ; and they tell me it is charming to be rich."

Bligh could not resist saying, in a low voice, "But are you so sure of being rich ? Do you know the terrible uncertainty of the law, and that it is not right that always wins ? Cases like yours are full of dangers and difficulties. I have no right to say this, for I am interested for one you consider your enemy, or whom you wish to dispossess."

"Indeed, no ; a thousand times no. I would not injure her for the world. They tell me she is a charming, innocent girl ; but I have my rights. It is she who is injuring *me*. Do you like her ? *is* she so charming ?"

Bligh for a moment became a little enthusiastic.

"Not a word too much could be said for her. She is full of grace and beauty, and I tremble when I think what is impending over her. If you only knew how she has been brought up—kept from any stroke of pain or sorrow save *one*—from every breath that could cause annoyance—surrounded with luxury, her own will her only law,—you could imagine what a terrible blow this will be for her."

"But," said the young girl, "it will not be so bad as that for her. We shall let her have something. We French are not quite so cruel as you seem to think. We shall leave her something—enough to live on."

Bligh shook his head.

"Enough to live on in your sense would be beggary for her ; enough to live on in her sense would mean the fortune she has now. She is very sensitive ; a mere flower, that would wither—"

The young girl coloured.

"How romantic !" she said. "Is she so great a friend of yours ? How long have you known her ?"

"Since I was a boy," said he.

"And I suppose she likes you. She ought certainly ; for you are a very warm ally. You will of course be her counsel?"

"No," he said, embarrassed ; "there are reasons against that, especially after what has occurred to-day."

"How curious all this is !" said Eugenie, reflecting ; "and what is this charming enemy of mine like?"

Bligh was about to say that Diana resembled her so strikingly when she interrupted him.

"But I am quite friendless here. I have no one to look to or to turn to, and no one that is kind to me for myself. I wish they had left me to my dear convent ; and yet I could not go back now, for this has all unsettled me. Who can refuse to be rich when they tell you it is certain?"

"But who tells you?" said Bligh gently. "As I told you, there is nothing certain in law. How can that French lady know—"

"It is not she. There is another ; that strange, fierce lady who knows all and who moves all, and whom I fear so, and whom even Madame Saxe dreads. You do not know what manner of woman she is, and what she can do."

"Yes," said Bligh, "I do know her. You mean Mrs. Bligh—my mother."

"Your mother !" said the girl, rising up suddenly ; "Mrs. Bligh your mother !"

There was a pause. Robert Bligh rose also.

"Now you will understand," he said. "There are others who have their troubles as well as you. She has her own views in this. She is on your side in this business ; I cannot be. Neither can I be your friend, nor sympathise with you, which I would wish to be, as I would for any stranger. So good-bye. You cannot ask me to wish you success, even though my mother is on your side."

As he walked away he thought a great deal of this incident, taking a true barrister's view of it.

"If I had been inclined or so unprincipled as to en-

courage her," he said to himself, "she would have told me anything I wanted to know." But the strange air and likeness that was about her seemed fatal. "Poor, poor Diana!" he thought, as he sat down to his table and listlessly opened out his briefs, "it is all over for her."

And though those heavy arrears, though the snowy bales of linen were waiting their turns, and time was very precious, it was long before he could concentrate his attention. At times he would start up and walk; but at last set himself desperately to work with this speech, "There could be no harm in *that*. Yes; she might be brought to compromise it."

There are plenty of jeremiads over the hard fate of "the man in full business," and who has to combine law and Parliament; yet there must be an excitement that redeems all from sheer drudgery—the "showy" cases, the constant hurry and "panting and toiling" to keep up with time, the change of scene from the House to Court. The barrister who is not absolutely killing himself, not ghastly pale or unwholesome yellow, may well look back with pleasure to those stirring days.

Mr. Bligh, now pursued and wanted by every one,—videttes of clerks waiting for him at turns and corners, and very often pounced upon with a mysterious air by the "whip" and manager,—was now hopelessly committed to this absorbing life, and had to go round and round in the ring without being allowed to stop. He had long fought off this state of things; but events had proved too much for him. He saw he must be left behind altogether, or fly round headlong like the rest.

He was one day sitting in the library of the House of Commons, with his head rather weary, having snatched a few moments to consult some books of international law for a great parliamentary question now drawing on, and on which he had a dreamy notion of speaking, when a letter was brought to him. He laid down the Kent's "Commentaries," and read the following:—

'DEAR SIR,—Since the evening I saw you I have been thinking over what you said. I begin to feel more and

more every hour how miserable it is being dragged into this business. There seems to be no likelihood of its ending or of its beginning, and they tell me too much has been ventured for me now to withdraw ; but your words about the uncertainty of law seem to ring in my ears. Would I had never left my own dear country ! I know not what to do. But if you would not think it a liberty in me, or asking too much, it would make me very happy if I could see you, and consult you again as to what I am to do ; still more if you would change your resolution about not appearing in my case. At all events, dear sir, would you let me see you and consult ; for I have no one to consult, and I would almost promise to be guided by you.—I remain yours, &c.,

EUGENIE GAY."

Bligh threw this down on the table, then tore it up leisurely in many small pieces, then wrote an answer. It covered but a page, and ran—

"MADAM,—I regret it would be quite impossible for me to change my mind. I still think it would be advantageous for every suitor to settle his case, in preference to expensive and uncertain litigation ; but I could not take upon myself to advise you in this instance. Indeed, you must excuse me if I tell you that my relation to all these matters is very delicate indeed. For the future, therefore, I must decline to interfere.—I am yours,

"ROBERT BLIGH."

He was not a little unsettled by this communication, for it now seemed as if these were very much the tactics of an adventuress.

"She has heard from the solicitor about me," he thought, "and would like to pick up all she could." He had seen specimens enough of that artful behaviour in the witness-box.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### WHISPERS AND SCANDALS.

**D**IANA had her horses as usual, and the great argosy, which, after an interval, she had resumed. With Mr. Lugard she used to be seen on the great Prado in the Park, that gentleman appearing splendid and *rayonnant* in this new part of his, having become more gracious and soft of late ; as was indeed remarked by his club acquaintances, with a conscious and "knowing" air, which, in the language of men too intimate and too languid to spend words, signified quite a whole conversation. Among these familiars a shrug stood for an anecdote ; and thus was saved much precious time. It was indeed something to see Diana fresh and glittering as though she had been taken out of a jewel-case ; or upon her "satin-coated" steed (as a "Lounger in Rotten Row" once wrote down to the *Mercury*), whose coat, glistening with a golden-brown, threw out the small delicate figure with surprising effect. With them used to ride a fashionable warder—Mrs. Wycherly, wife of Captain Wycherly—a pleasant, agreeable lady, whom Diana regarded with wonder and secret admiration, and who carried on the profession of the handsome married lady—chartered free-lance—than which none is more inviting, for the time. Lugard, in his way, represented the other branch of the profession.

Thus the trio rode along; now charging at full speed, their horses scattering the mould; now drawn up in the great group opposite the gates, as if waiting to receive cavalry. Anon Colonel Crozier or Lord Symperly would join, and the little party would break into twos, his lordship and Mrs. Wycherly in front, Captain Lugard and Miss Gay behind. Then Mr. Lugard would say, "Let them go on in front. I suppose that Symperly has his usual wallet of folly. *Do* go on. *Teach me*, as you were doing when he came up."

Teach Captain Lugard! We should like to have seen any other gentleman or lady make *that* speech! "Teach me!" he would have answered, his lips curling, "what, pray? What is this wonderful knowledge you are in possession of? Who taught *you*, pray? If it is not too curious a question, *have* you been taught at all? You had better be sure of that first," &c. Yet Diana was teaching this rather intractable scholar. For the first time in her life she had been consulted, asked for advice, and for some of her rather slender worldly knowledge. "I know nothing," Mr. Lugard would say gloomily, "I, that have been about and mixed with every one. I am shipwrecked; I know not how it will end. And yet I wish to do right. You have seen for yourself—all that I strive, all that I suffer, all that I am *obliged* to suffer. It may be my fault—most likely it is; for I am not perfect," added Mr. Lugard handsomely. "But I leave it to you; you have now for some time seen what our household is, and what fatal discord reigns in it. As I say, it may be my fault; but still, if I knew what to do, if some one—if you would only tell me or teach me!"

This was not the first time our Diana had been so invited. A flush of real pleasure overspread her innocent cheek, and a sensation, which she did not know to be born of vanity, rose in her. She was not the child, after all, that Lady Margaret always seemed to hint she was, or that she herself thought she was. She was not to lead that sort of purposeless life, which her own conscience so often whispered to her was, besides profitless, devoted



to toys and vanities, to the mere battledore-and-shuttlecock of life, the soap-bubble blowing, which she had always a suspicion she could not rise beyond. Oh, here was the opportunity! if she could only bring these two hapless souls to know and understand each other! But it is oftener an accident that determines a mind on a certain course than a mere studious and officious advice or remonstrance.

Wally Pepys had come up to her in his specially confidential way—kept for young ladies exclusively—and had said, “Ah! I see you have taken our friend in hand. I declare he is getting more human and less savage every hour. Will you put me down for the next vacancy?”

“But you are human, and not savage,” said Diana, smiling. “But indeed Captain Lugard is not savage; we were children together, and he is like a cousin.”

Mr. Lugard took great pleasure in this process of his own reformation, listening with great docility while our heroine advised and counselled; then taking up the theme himself, dwelling on the point—a little worn now—of his having been *manqué* from the beginning, of no one understanding him, of his life being one succession of crosses and misfortunes. “And,” added he one evening as they were alone in the drawing-room, “it is not so much my fault after all. I might have been now happy and prosperous, instead of having to look forward to years of misery from which there is no prospect of release.”

Diana really did not understand.

“But how?” she asked.

“What!” said he, turning on her with a half-wounded, half-indignant air, “you forget *that*? You don’t wish to mortify me, I suppose, by reminding me of that humiliating day when—”

“When,” said Diana, beginning to be fluttered, and looking round uneasily—“when my poor father was taken from me?”

“Yes,” he said; “I know that. But for a great deal of all this you are accountable, Diana. Surely you

remember how we were children together, and how as a boy I was always taught and encouraged to look to *you* as the great object. Even your father—”

“Never, never!” said Diana, a little excited; “not by me. Such a thing, as I live, never entered my mind. I always liked you, Richard, but I could not be so cruel as to hold out hopes which could not be realised.”

His lips showed that he had a sarcasm ready. “What of Lord Patmore? You loved *him*, I suppose? Oh, now, pray be a little consistent.”

Diana was much confused by this thrust. “I had not my own free will. I was forced into it—”

“You! a free agent, able to do what you please! Oh, that *is* folly! But I may speak out now, Diana, as all that is past and done with. I tell you plainly, I *did* look forward to marrying you; and you know that, Diana. And if I had done so my life would have been different, and to me a blessing, inst—”

This language, which was indeed the truth, quite scared her.

“Oh, Richard, you must not talk of that; indeed you must not. And if I had thought for a moment—”

“I don’t *want* to talk of it,” said he, impatiently; “Heaven knows it is no pleasant subject for me. But we must look those things in the face; and you know, dear, it is the truth. I might have been a different man now, happy and prosperous and successful. But that can’t be helped. Only,” he added with some bitterness, “I see you have lost even your old kindness. I suppose now that I have failed, and that I am no longer successful, I deserve contempt. You are quite right—it is only the way of the world.”

Much hurt by this cruel insinuation, and at the same time full of sympathy, our Diana quite forgot the little shock she had at first sustained when Lugard was dwelling on his old attachment, and at the end was only anxious to encourage and fortify him in the course from which he had now no retreat. When next they spoke, Lugard thanked her warmly, and said he felt much better

and stronger; and Diana was full of joy, and really began to think her profession and special "call" in life was this little art of making ill-suited married people live together pleasantly. "Such little ways as I have," she thought to herself, "trifling as they are, and which seem to please people, it may be Heaven's will I should turn to this use." There was a strain of very ardent piety through her nature, and on Sundays she followed rather fiery ministers of the Gospel, and trembled and grew tearful as they roared torments and tortures, and at less-troubled moments bent her eyes down over her book, and prayed with her whole little heart.

But while the Rev. William Monkirons, hottest of gossellers (it was strange that this delicate creature should be drawn by these strong and raging pious curries), made his chapel (Lady Dulcimer's chapel-of-ease) resound with wild cries against ungodliness and worldly pleasures, our Diana was not at all conscious that she was innocently sitting enrolled in the band whom Mr. Monkirons had sternly sentenced to be "cast out." Those ridings on the bright bay, with the gallant Lugard and the admired Mrs. Wycherley, repeated so often; those expeditions in the same unvarying company to opera and ball; the friendly and trusting encouragement of the young lady, began to attract the attention of the idle and the scandalous.

Lady Poldoodie said with a smile "that all parties had got rid of poor dear Lady Margaret most conveniently;" and the faithless Wally Pepys asked, "wasn't there a wife put by in some *maison de santé* quite as conveniently?" Some one to whom Lugard had been specially brusque, or even rude, threw another little rag in, as the *chiffonier's* basket passed to him. "Mrs. Monkton says she saw them both walking in Richmond Park *alone*." And what that lady had told was strictly true, "for once in her life," as Mr. Pepys would have said, but she could not have seen Mrs. Wycherly and another friend who were sitting on a bench not very far away. In this way the buzz began, which gradually swelled into a loud drone. Mr. Lugard soon heard it, and with the complacent vanity of

his sex bent his ears to listen, and gave the foolish smile of disclaimer which means admission. Indeed, this season of his rather tumultuous life was very pleasant to him to think on—a snatch of a dream, though any moment he would be awakened. But neither drone nor buzz ever reached those little pink, smart, delicate shells that were Diana's charming ears. Meaning looks, indeed, she might translate, if she would: but she was too unskilled in such matters.

Sometimes on the great thoroughfare and crowded highway of fashionable life she would meet Robert Bligh, now become the strange *rara avis*—a good-looking barrister in large practice in Parliament, yet not chained to his shelves like the books in the monks' libraries, but seen abroad at "the dance, the dinner, and the drum"—the burden of a pleasant song, which he himself wrote, "knocked off" one evening, and which the good-looking young composer, Arthur Western, had set to music; "words by Robert Bligh, Esq., M.P."

" The dance, the dinner, and the drum—  
Young and old we come—we come.  
The drum, the dance, the dinner;  
Charming saint, more charming sinner.  
The drum, the dinner, and the dance;  
Many a fair and many a lance."

His progress was wonderful. "Sure to be next Solicitor." "Wouldn't take a judgeship." "On the high-road to the woolsack," were the agreeable prophecies made about him; though indeed there is no high-road to the woolsack, but rather a dark walk through a wood, or perhaps a jump across a crevasse, with a successful landing on the other side. He had youth and good looks—the best ornaments and decorations in the world, and which, when combined with success, are irresistible. His table and chimneypiece were covered with cards and invitations, and made a curious mingle-mangle with briefs and parliamentary papers. Some friends and admirers wondered exceedingly that he had not yet spoken in the

House ; but we, who by this time know something of Mr. Robert Bligh and his disciplined nature, may readily guess that this was only the old caution—the making sure of the ground, and waiting till the proper opportunity arose. Many also noticed—for the movements of any rising man are watched with an almost flattering observance—that he was scarcely in good spirits. The same observers had “their eye on him” when he and Miss Gay met, and noticed her attempt at a haughty greeting, and his cold manner. And they also saw how her gaze followed him with a sort of wistful curiosity as he went away with the beautiful Miss Henniker on his arm—Lady Jane Williamson’s cousin, and most honourable daughter to Lord Mountermine. Indeed Mr. Bligh was now constantly at Mr. Attorney-General’s, and Lady Jane—as the phrase runs—“could do nothing without him.” Was it at all surprising that the meddling *Cuckoo* should presently flap its wings, give one of its shrill screams, and announce to all London on its front page, “We understand that a marriage has been arranged between the Honourable Emily Henniker and Mr. Robert Bligh, M.P. for Calthorpe”? And though “there was not a particle of truth, my dear,” in the whole business, the matter was, strange to say, left uncontradicted. For Mr. Bligh was none of those sensitive and rather mean souls who would be disturbed at such a public *affiche*; nay, would rather feel it a high honour to have his name coupled with any lady’s; and, on the other hand, Miss Henniker and “her party,” as the racing world would say, very fondly wished that the statement could be made true. It was Captain Lugard who brought in that last number of the *Cuckoo* and tossed it down triumphantly. “There,” he said, “I knew he’d sell himself to the highest bidder. It’s only what I expected.”

Diana read. Her lips curled a little.

“And who is Miss Henniker?”

“Don’t you see?” went on Lugard with great scorn; “a relation of the Williamsons,—Lady Jane, and all that. He wants to creep into something that way. Just the

same as he ever was, even at school, when he was always toadying old Wheeler's nephew, who was among the boys."

Diana read it over very often.

"Is she pretty?" was another woman's question.

"And that poor Buller whom he has treated so scandalously," went on Lugard; "kept on and off for all these years. Isn't that like him? He finds old Buller isn't worth much in the political way, and he throws the poor girl off. But the Ministry is shaky enough, and I hope to Heaven he will be overreached."

Thus was our second hero engaged, scarcely fancying that he was quite giving the *coup de grâce* to the demolition of the old image. Yet this gentleman knew very little of the human heart, and of the female human heart especially. All this piqued and tantalized the young lady sorely, and fretted and vexed her; though, to say the truth, she did not believe a syllable of the story about Miss Henniker,—albeit certified in print, and by the *Cuckoo*. Much as she resented his "cruel and unkind" behaviour, she still had a secret instinct and certitude that the old silver chain was not broken, and that though she might cast away *her* end, he had not strength to do the same with his.

After Richard Lugard had gone out, she read this announcement very often. Then her eye wandered down listlessly over the other oracular notices, as to persons "accepting the Chiltern Hundreds," and the rumour that Lord Bulstock was likely to be "the new Lord Cofferer."

"Fancy," said some of the cynics of the day, "*being* a Lord Cofferer at all; but what manner of man must that be whose hopes and fears are agitated by the chance of being *likely* to be a Lord Cofferer?"

Her eye rested then on some paragraphs like this: "It is said that there is a rock ahead for the Ministry, of the danger of which the astute captain who commands is quite sensible; and that he has enrolled some amateur hands in the crew; not indeed 'rated' on the ship's books, but who will be taken in according to the work they do. One of these 'dark' auxiliaries is said to be the

new member for Calthorpe, who brings a mysterious reputation, which defies time, place, or man's recollection. It is said he has been retained to do this duty on some evening in the following week, when Mr. Masham brings on his motion."

Diana almost started as she read. The dull Lugard was only building up, instead of destroying. Her exclamation almost was her old one: "Oh, how wonderful he is! how clever! Indeed he is getting success." And she sat there for a long time, dreaming over these great prospects, and determined to make out what was the meaning of these political riddles. Not so much pity is akin to love: it is more so to contempt. Admiration or public success is the true quickener.





## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PETRUCCI AFFAIR.

**I**T came to pass about this time that news reached England, among other foreign items, that a certain half-Englishman and half-Italian called Petrucci, who was a kind of mongrel agent out in Chili, had been seized by that government and put in prison for smuggling. This piece of news did not affect the public mind, and was read at many a breakfast-table half-mechanically, taking up a space no more than a single line. But in a week or so one of the light horse of Parliament—the stray, disengaged Cossacks, who scour about on little active animals of motions and “questions”—marked this speck warily in the horizon, and pricked down upon it. Mr. Derby Blagden was the lucky rider who pounced on the prey first, and he “put a question to the noble lord at the head of the Government”—the tight, wiry, compact, elderly English country gentleman who then administered affairs with such success, in the very perfection of *laissez faire*. There were some patriots of the Roman sort who objected to this principle; and who, as one of them said, did not wish the politics of the country to be dealt with in the fashion the architect of their palace had treated the interior Gothic pillars and stonework—namely, by covering up the roughness and decay with a smooth and even coat of “nice” buff paint.



Others were discontented at this successful "jockeyship," as they called it; others, again, were envious; more were greedy. The old politician, however, held his way; directing the country very much as he rode his cob down to the House—in a pleasant half-amble, half-walk. But when Blagden put his question, and received a jocular—perhaps saucy—answer, which caused a general laugh, some of the discontented began to "take the thing up;" the hostile newspapers saw that there was something in it, and as the thing grew and began to be discussed, and it was asserted "that the honour of the country" had been touched, matters began to look different. Soon the heading was changed to "The Petrucci Outrage;" and it was fairly started as a great question when it became known that Mr. Masham, a usual supporter of the Government, had given notice of a motion on the subject. This was indeed serious; for it was before the era when the device of mere privates and sergeants in the regiment denouncing their colonel and officers was found to be a piquant way of acquiring reputation.

Every one began to talk of the matter, in clubs and coteries; the old Minister put on his jauntiest manner, but was disquieted; *laissez faire*, his Mephistopheles, seemed to have deserted him; and people, by talking so much of the danger, made it appear more serious than it really was. It grew and grew; another great and independent member put an amendment on the paper; there was a mustering and drilling, and it had become a regular "party" question. That was the recall; the whips were already out, the patrols scouring the alleys and political public-houses for their stray men.

What interest could this great question have for Diana, with that greater division which affected her case now impending? She lived in a sort of trepidation and excitement as the day drew near. It was only three weeks away now. Very often she used to repair to her friend Sir John, the Attorney-General, who gave her such snatches of comfort as he could.

"My poor child, I can tell you nothing; I wish I

could. You must train yourself to bear whatever may come—defeat or, as I trust it will be, success. You see, if they make out their case as it stands—if they prove it—why, I am afraid. But then, will a jury believe them? will they believe that Mrs. Bligh, that half-mad, half-wicked woman, whom I shall have the pleasure of cross-examining? And, my dear child, if we don't make an *exposé* of her let us be defeated on this motion that is coming on. Now, you must run away. I have to defend Ministers on the law of the business; get up the Chili view, and Kent and Story and Vattel, and all those rascals whom your little head has nothing to do with. It will be warm work. There is a clever fellow to follow me, though; you remember Bligh—my cross-examinee's son?"

"What, he is to speak!" said Diana with interest. "But he is no friend of mine; he was once."

"Why, you don't suppose he has anything to do with that? Lord bless you, he has too much to do. That's one of that Page's stories, who is a little too much of the detective for me. Mind, I prophesy he'll make a name with this speech."

"But others say it," said Diana. "Oh, he has been so unkind and cruel, so treacherous, they tell me."

"Now, I must turn you out," said Sir John a little abruptly; "you'll come to me again, and we'll talk of this."

Diana went away in her cab with her maid. She liked these expeditions—the unofficial "explorings" in streets and shops. But she thought as she went along of what Sir John had said, and for the first time it did occur to her that Mr. Page was scarcely of the proper sort as a legal adviser. She thought again and again of Bligh's old devotion, proved in a hundred ways, and that, after all, the chief evidence against him of dislike to her was the angry jealousy of "poor Lugard." Under all this feeling (but she was not conscious of its presence)—was the sense of curiosity and admiration—admiration at his power and cleverness and steady progress; and it was

scarcely surprising that "poor Lugard's" purposeless life—a series of failures—should seem to her not a little contemptible. With all this came a curious and restless desire which attended her as she went about, to see something of this coming success. She would give anything to know, to look on at, his triumph; he was sure to be successful, as indeed she had a presentiment.

This idea took possession of her, and before the evening was over she had written one of her "nice little notes" to her good friend the Attorney-General.

"MY DEAR SIR JOHN,—I should so like to hear this wonderful debate that is coming on, and the great speeches that will be made. Could you get me into the ladies' gallery? Would it be too much?"

"DIANA GAY."

"Curious girl," thought Sir John. "She will find me very dry. Vattel will bore her." Even Her Majesty's Attorney-General became stupid in the presence of his own complacency. He wrote back that he would manage it, and that Lady Williamson would call for her. Diana was delighted, as she always was at the success of any of her little schemes.

When she saw Lugard again he was eager with a new arrangement.

"I have got tickets for that concert you wished to go to," he said. "I know you like music, and I moved heaven and earth to get them."

Kitty was sitting in her favourite position, looking at the fire in a sort of half-reverie, and broke out harshly with "How many things have you moved heaven and earth for?" Poor heaven and earth!—and for a concert-ticket!"

Lugard turned on her impatiently. "There is one thing," he began; but Diana's imploring look—she was always wretched when she saw these first guns fired—checked him.

"Go on," said Mrs. Lugard, turning round full on

him ; "finish, pray. I suppose to get rid of me you would move heaven and earth?"

"No, no ; indeed, Kitty, you mistake," said Diana eagerly ; "he meant no such thing. But I am so sorry about this concert, as I have promised to go to Lady Jane Williamson's."

"It was arranged we were to go," said he, his brow contracting. "But it is no matter ; only if you knew the labour and work I had to go through to get them. But it is no matter ; and what is the entertainment you have preferred ? I thought you had ceased to care for going out."

"Oh, this is no party," said Diana, a little confused. "Lady Jane is to take me."

Something interfered at this moment, and Diana was called away. Meantime the days passed by rapidly. The newspapers, as usual, described the coming motion as "fraught with perils to the stability of the Government," and warned the old wiry Viscount to set his house in order. The *Regent Street Chronicle* had pleasant speculations on the subject, and one article headed "The Break-down of *Laissez Faire*." In short, this cloud, which, according to the well-worn measure of dimension, had been no bigger than the Viscount's own hand, grew steadily, and spread until it made the Government skies as dark as pitch.

On the evening of the debate Diana was in a sort of excitement and flutter, as indeed she usually was when there was a little expedition before her. For Lugard politics had now no attraction. He rarely looked at a newspaper ; and since his late experience he always turned away his eyes from the columns which had to do with anything in the House. If any *gauche* person dwelt long on that subject in his presence, he would rise up impatiently and leave the room abruptly. His friends remarked good-naturedly that he was "devilish sore" on the matter. He had therefore never noticed the "crisis" that was drawing on, and if he had, would have turned away his eyes. On this evening down came Diana about

five o'clock in her full regimentals, as they might be called, fluttering her plumage of burnous and flowers, and eager to be in time. Richard was out, but as Lady Jane's carriage came up he arrived at the door and met Diana in the hall.

"Why, where on earth," he cried,—"*where are you going at this hour?*"

With a little guiltiness from the discovery, "We are going down to the House to hear the debate," said Diana hurriedly. "Only think! Good-bye; don't wait for me." As she looked back from the carriage, she saw him standing with a puzzled air.

"They are all alike," he was saying to himself; "she knew the mean things I had done to get her those tickets; begged them from a fellow who will make me feel it to the end of my life, and yet she puts me aside for some whim that just strikes her. She has no steadiness; she does not care what I have done, what I am doing for her."

He went away moodily to his club, and dined there by himself. Mrs. Kitty had her solitary meal, which might have been a relief. Lugard stayed there the whole evening, not choosing to return, mechanically looking at newspapers which he did not care to read. Indeed, most of those who knew him now took care to give him a wide berth. It was so troublesome, they said, talking to him, and he was so abrupt and sudden, you never knew where to have him.

About ten the room began to fill and grow noisy as men came dropping in, dressed to go to amusement, or coming from it, and gathered in knots to talk. He could not help hearing what a new arrival was proclaiming: "Bligh, Bligh—that's the name!" and the sound seemed to prick him like a lancet. "That's the name! As fine a thing as was ever heard. It'll set them on their legs. The old chief went up to him and shook him by the hand, and they say if they weather this he'll be the new Solicitor!" Richard was drawing his breath hard, and tried to hear more manfully. A military member for some place now comes in: "I wish I could talk like that

fellow. Did you ever hear such *tune* as there was in his voice? And, by Jove! how they did listen; you'd have heard a toothpick drop. But those lawyer-men can talk on end on anything. Were you in when he gave the picture of Benlevi? such a cool touching-up! Of course he had made it up before."

Lugard started up. It all flashed upon him. She, Diana, had gone to hear this triumph! A thousand curses on this evil genius facing him at every turn! It was done to mortify, to ruin him, to wear his very soul out with vexation. Had he met Robert Bligh at that moment he might have called out to him, "Defend yourself!" and have struck him with his closed hand across the face.





## CHAPTER X.

### THE DEBATE.

**D**IANA and Lady Jane had reached the gloomy galleries and monastic halls of the House, and had made their way to the greater outside hall, where people were crowding and hurrying to and fro, and being constantly put back to that mysterious boundary-line of tiles within which MEMBERS alone,—sacred birds of the Capitol—were allowed to stand and lounge. It seemed to Diana, greatly excited by the presence of these hereditary legislators, that in this function they took an especial pride, being glad to display themselves within this mystic ring, and exhibit their privilege. The Attorney-General had come out to them much worn and anxious, his hand full of papers. "We must be quick," he said, "as I have to reply to this man. He is speaking now."

Once more Diana was looking down into that rich chamber, crowded on this night as it had not been when the ill-omened "motion on soldiers' wives" had been brought forward. Every seat was filled. There was no buzz, such as had attended the performance of the luckless Richard. The captains were in their places, wearing the conventional air of inattention, their beavers thrust down over their eyes. Diana knew where to look for her heroes, or at least their hats, and made out "the sea-

green incorruptible ;” and the granite-hewn face of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the other great law-givers crowded close, dressing up their ranks, rows of many faces looking mainly one way, to where a wiry gentleman, sharp and sour faced, was speaking in a clear, thin voice, and with many words. He was “denouncing the Government,” fiercely drawing a glowing picture of the old days of English nautical ascendancy. “When, sir, as the British frigate hove in sight, and the little strip of bunting fluttered aloft, the dungeon-doors opened of their own instinct, and the captives walked down to the beach free !” Or it might be that some blind mulish barbarians resisted, and then a white puff and a ball of British metal came crashing from an English gun among the roofs. That letter brought a speedy answer. Now it was all changed. Instead of their looking for wooden or iron walls, the captives had to wait the next mail, and on the devoted town came showering a storm of official paper from the Foreign Office.

Diana was not a little moved by this picture of the departed greatness of her country ; and her pretty lips curled when she thought of the outrage offered to her flag. It was fine that—the British-built vessel quietly climbing the horizon, and extorting satisfaction as it were by a frown. The speaker was said to have made out a most damaging case ; and sitting down, moved for the correspondence.

The Attorney-General rose promptly, and in a dry chipping tone slid at once into cold legal details.

“Oh, this is only John,” said Lady Jane, with coolness. “My dear, we must make up our mind to a long sermon. He can talk the whole day if he likes.”

“But where are they all going ?” said Diana suddenly, and stretching forward as the legislators began to hurry out.

Some of the political ladies smiled.

“To dine, I suppose, dear,” said Lady Jane with perfect unconcern ; “the great speakers will be coming on presently.”



There was indeed an indecent rout ; a mortification which Sir John, to Diana's surprise, did not seem to feel in the least.

It was very dry, very dull and monotonous, though Diana did her best to make up by special attention. But the arguments hurt her head, they were so very close. Yet next morning it read uncommonly lucid, and very simple, convincing, and unprofessional ; and the great leading journal said that the first law-officer of the Crown had done a service to the House in clearing the ground ; and with a rare self-sacrifice, instead of spinning, had brushed away all cobwebs.

Then some one else spoke,—young Lord Cordurois, who made a smart, rattling, “cocky” speech, in which he “rattled” on for twenty minutes, using illustrations drawn from the slang of the day, and dotting the next morning's column with “much laughter” and “loud laughter ;” as when he said that the noble lord at the head of the Government reminded him of “the chicken-salad man” —a song then in high favour,—

“If you touch she,  
Now pray let her be ;  
But if you touch *me*,  
Why then we shall see.”

(“Loud laughter, in which the noble Viscount heartily joined.”)

“How good !” said some of the political ladies, who knew this lively and spirited lord very well, and saw him at their houses.

When he had done, Diana remarked that a perfect Babel broke out, with cries of “New member,” “Spoke,” and the like ; which presently were lulled away as the portly gentleman under the canopy sonorously pronounced a name. Then she heard a quiet, calm voice, but one that was clear and musical, below her ; and a little excitedly she recognised the small figure. The political ladies were a little interested too.

“One of the new men,” said one ; “they expect something from him.”

It was indeed Robert Bligh—gracious, conciliating, good-humoured, and deferential at first ; but now beginning to fire a stray bullet, now a small firework, which made people smile and grow attentive. Now the wiry old Viscount jogs his head over his jaunty folded arms in approbation ; now “the sea-green incorruptible” uncoils himself slowly, raises his hooded head, and languidly turns his curious eye over, as asking, “Is this food for me?”

The buzz gradually subsided as the new voice rose ; then came the laugh—genuine and hearty ; then the applause of “Hear, hear”—overpowering and tumultuous. No one could have guessed what a fund of sarcasm had been as yet undeveloped in Robert Bligh. Of course Lugard, and men like Lugard, would have said that all this had been prepared ; and so it was, in a certain degree.

We quoted in Mr. Lugard’s case what the intelligent author of “Thumbnail Sketches in the House” had said of that rising young politician ; but we must now give from the agreeable *Regent Street Chronicle* what it thought of the new player who had joined in the game.

“When the House met last night, it was easy to see that a warm night’s work was expected. To use a homely and well-worn metaphor, there was to be many a main fought, and both Ministry and Opposition had their respective birds trimmed, dressed, and ready spurred. . . . But we must congratulate Mr Merry, the Government whip, on the new and brilliant auxiliary which fluttered into the pit last night with fiery eye, undaunted spirit, and untiring vivacity. The feature of the night was certainly the *début* of Mr. Robert Bligh, a young barrister in leading practice, just risen from his briefs, and whose harmonious voice and winning manner would alone be a treasury in that diapason of croaks, growls, huskinesses, conversational expostulation, and *sotto voce* unintelligibility, which constitute the diatonic scale of House-of-Commons eloquence. But this was the smallest feature ; for almost at once he grew epigrammatic and

pleasantly sarcastic ; as when he described the authors of such motions as like a party of idle boys who have borrowed or stolen a gun, with which they go out to shoot sparrows, and who sometimes wound a human being through carelessness. This told well with the House. Nothing, too, could be better than the illustration drawn from his own profession as to the interest expressed by the Opposition for an obscure creature like Petrucci, which he likened to the interest of the low-class solicitor who takes up what are called speculative actions, and looks out for paupers and such persons who may have some fancied cause of complaint against substantial people who may be 'good marks for costs.'

"His elaboration of this topic, and introduction on the scene of the right honourable gentleman who leads the Opposition, as another solicitor of a 'more respectable complexion'—who, when he sees the case is likely to assume un hoped-for proportions, prepares to intervene—was excellent. Good, too, as a piece of etching was his picture of the 'dirty foreigner' creatures, who, under this semi-British protection, scheme, pillage and oppress, in these far-off places, and when the richly-deserved, and too long-delayed, bastinado falls on their soles yelp and shriek for the aid of their protectors. 'Then,' continued Mr. Bligh, 'do our Bucentaurs and Terribles and Thunderers weigh their mighty anchors, and spread their noble canvas, and prepare to make their hundred-and-twenty, or seventy-four, throats bellow. The great jaws open, the incipient roar is imminent, the Thunderer of England is about to echo, all because a mean clerk—analogue in position to some of our most doubtful commission-agents, whose stock-in-trade is a large brass plate, and office-desk and two chairs—has been taken by the shoulders and turned out roughly. But let him add to these valuable properties a small but precious pocket-handkerchief—a parti-coloured article, striped in various hues—and he has an amulet or talisman that will work wonders. He has but to seat himself on a corner of this tiny carpet, and, like the hero in the fairy-tale, it will carry

him wherever he will. That handkerchief is the British flag, and to use it for such purposes is indeed to make a clout of it.'

"There were more plums in the new pudding the honourable member for Calthorpe set before the House in his maiden speech, which contrasted favourably with the scanty currants dotted through the hardbake of other hon. members. We place one or two of these at the service of the country gentlemen. His likening a certain discontented right hon. member who brings on motions damaging to his own party, when he thinks himself neglected, to the Italian organ-grinders, 'whom you have to pay to go away,' was happy enough. His allusion to the late notorious escapade of the leader of the Opposition when he was head of the Government, and his sacrifice of a tried colleague to preserve his position, was quite 'smart.' Mr. Bligh likened him to the skilful gentleman we see sometimes in the circus 'on a bare-backed steed,' who, after much hesitation, leaps through a paper hoop, and lands on the insecure support of the flying animal, with difficulty preserving his balance. All this, if not of a very high order of wit, was certainly lively, and will of course secure for the speech the distinction of what gentlemen who supply 'London letters' to the country papers call 'an absorbing topic of gossip at the clubs.'"





## CHAPTER XI.

### PLAINTIFF AND DEFENDANT.

**A**FTER the speech there was a flutter in the gallery : various members came up to see their “ladies,” and there was a rustle as of going. In a moment Diana had given a start. She saw a face at the door. Other faces were turned eagerly to it. He was coming to her—to get her congratulations—to share his triumph with her. Oh ! she could forgive all that had passed ; but to her surprise he went by with a bow. When he had passed her by with this stiffness, Diana felt a curious chill at her heart, something whispering her that she was now outside *that* circle. It then flashed upon her—what was till that moment a mere phantom, and what she could only smile at hitherto—that he had indeed succeeded in “curing himself.” Then, with something like a pang, she found this was all but a conviction of the most fatal logical accuracy. Of *course* one so resolved to succeed—so firm of purpose—could have no difficulty in arriving at that. Then she saw him pass by and go on beyond to a lady whom she had never noticed before and whom she was sure was the Miss Henniker of the *Cuckoo*. Shall it be said that the moment was a turning-point in the life of our Diana ; that she saw now the vanity, the folly of that state of pleasant fitfulness, that agreeable “not knowing her own mind,” with liberty to change with every hour ; that

claim to the privilege of holding every one subject to her little airs who were to know their mind with regard to her without there being any corresponding reciprocity on her side? For all this she now seemed to see that a penalty had swiftly overtaken her.

Diana, during the lulls in the debate, which were weary enough, had noted two foreign-looking ladies, one old and the other young, who sat at some distance from her. Something in the younger girl attracted her, who had rich brown hair, soft eyes, which now and again lit up with vivacity; and, though tall, had a certain foreign elegance. She noticed the deep interest, the absorbed air, at the most striking portions of the speech; how she leant forward with clasped hands and eager eyes, and how her face reflected every emotion. What was her surprise when, after Bligh had passed, so coldly and so gravely, she saw this young lady run to meet him enthusiastically, and leave the gallery with him! In older days the pretty lips of Diana would have curled; the prettier head would have been tossed back; she would have been ineffably scornful on "Mr. Bligh's taste." Now she felt a sort of pang, and surprised herself looking after the two with a sad and wistful air, and with a blankness at her young heart she had never experienced before.

"Yes," she thought bitterly, "he is quite in earnest, as he always is. He has forgotten and given me up for ever, and it was my own fault."

Lady Jane roused her from this reverie.

"Come, dear, we shall go home," she said; "we have had enough, I think; and though my poor dear Attorney is to reply, we must be spared *that*. We had him once. You shall come home with me. I asked in a few friends, and we can talk it over."

They came out, down through the crowded, bustling lobbies, past the mysterious cave-like doors which led into the sanctuary. Two eternal streams seemed to be crossing there—coming out, going in: the young, the handsome, the gay, the dull, the old and tottering; not the seven ages, but half a hundred fully; and then, as they

fluttered across, an eager figure rushed up to Diana, and more eager eyes were looking into her face.

"This is the amusement, is it?" said his excited, angry voice. "We have an interest, it seems. So you stole off to hear our old friend? Well, I never thought you could do that—Never!"

Lady Jane was listening haughtily.

"Hush, Richard!" said Diana.

"I don't understand these things," he went on in a loud voice. "A man that has behaved so to you, that should be outside the pale of society—"

"Who is this gentleman?" asked Lady Jane in a low voice. "There is our servant, and the carriage is waiting."

"Come away now," said Lugard. "Mrs. Lugard is here too, and will take you."

But Diana was in the mood to resent this, and might have answered a little impatiently, when she saw his face contract with almost a spasm, and his foot descend on the tiles with a fierce stamp.

She looked round, and saw Robert Bligh returning from the door. Every one that met him had a hurried greeting for him and congratulation. Even to their ears came the eager words, "Capital!" "Never heard anything better!" "You have set them on their legs again."

He stopped irresolute when he saw Diana and her party; but at this moment one of the great men—a stooping, elderly gentleman, whose back seemed composed of two shoulder-blades and nothing else—had him by the buttonhole.

At the same moment Diana's sympathies all turned backwards, and she felt for the poor "failure" beside her, in her tender heart. It was trying for Richard, and on this ground.

"For God's sake come away," he said in a low voice. "Don't speak to him; I can't bear it."

Robert was coming to them, and Lady Jane had beckoned to him; but with rare delicacy he checked himself, raised his hat, and passed into the House.

Diana took Lugard's arm, spoke to him with all her best kindness and sympathy, but Richard freed himself; and when he saw that Lady Jane was taking her home, made no remonstrance, and walked away slowly.

"Who is he?" said Lady Jane, as they got into the carriage; "seems rather good-looking,—in the wild-man-of-the-woods way."

Lady Jane was a very pleasant "lady of the house;" small in figure, intelligent, and with a half-sarcastic half-burlesque strain running through her conversation, which made it very agreeable and amusing. The little social theatre that she opened drew better than that of many other ladies. Round her sofa was always a standing group, and a representative group too,—men of politics, men of wit, men of science, men of letters, and that newer stratification, the man of politics and letters combined. You called in the afternoon, and found some tall gentleman with an Assyrian beard in an arm-chair, who withdrew with an aggrieved air when another of the same sex and on the same errand entered. Ladies only added to his appreciative audience, and there he had no objection. A few of this set were to be at Lady Jane's on this night—"coming on from the House," or going on to Lady D.'s.

To return a moment to our triumphant Bligh. When welcomed in the Ladies' Gallery with much effusion by the young foreign lady, he had scarcely shown signs of pleasure. His was rather a practical nature; and "worship," "incense," &c., so grateful to the nostrils of his fellows, he never cared for. With a sort of impulsiveness she poured out her praises and her delight: "It was so charming, so successful." Even her older relative thawed a little: "Eugenie insisted on coming; she was determined."

"You can have no interest in these things," said he absently, and looking towards the door by which Diana was departing. He was thinking too how curious it was that these two should be thus in sight of each other. What can you care about a speech of mine? Will you excuse me now?"



"Oh, will you not see us down?" said the young girl in a grieved tone; "we know no one—even don't know the way out of this strange place."

Bligh, not over-pleased at this companionship, bowed, and gave her his arm. Again the young girl broke out into her praises.

"Oh, you must be so clever, so brilliant; if you only heard all I heard! But I was going to ask you," she continued, in a low voice, and looking round timorously, "and I am sure you would assist me if you can." She now spoke very hurriedly, as if fearful of being overheard. "I am a stranger, and begin to feel very frightened. They will not let me do as I will; they will not tell me what is going forward, and I know will force me into what I *cannot* like. Oh, if you would only let me see you, let me go to you—"

Bligh stopped her, and answered very coldly. "I am sorry," he said, "but all this is quite out of the question. It is better for you to understand now. Any interest I can take in this matter must be on a side totally opposed to yours. Any assistance I can give must be to those whom you are striving to defeat. You must consider I have only had the pleasure of meeting you twice, whereas I am bound by long friendship to the family you are striving to eject."

Eugenie looked a little pained at this speech.

"I am not striving at all; it is my right, is it not? They tell me so. Ah, I see; *you like her*. You love her; you cannot deny it."

It was at this moment they passed Lady Jane and Diana in the lobby, as we have seen.

The foreign young girl's eyes were on his face. She followed his look, and then said suddenly, "Ah, there, I know *now*; there she is."

Plaintiff and defendant now passed close, and were looking at each other steadily.

As Bligh went down the steps to the carriage, he said firmly, but as graciously as he could, "Now I hope you have understood, and that if I should be obliged to take

any step opposed to your interests you will see the reason."

"But listen," said she in an eager whisper; "I will do what I can—what you like; only tell me."

"What *I* like!" repeated Bligh in astonishment. "Do you mean that you will—"

Her companion was close behind, and here struck in sharply. At Bligh she looked with something like hostility. He looked after them mechanically as they drove away.

"She means," he thought, "the thing could be settled. But it would be unworthy and unfair on my side, No; I shall not interfere."

Then Harding Hanaper seized on him, and drew him away.





## CHAPTER XII.

### LADY JANE'S.

**A**T LADY WILLIAMSON'S the usual scene—one of her pleasant evenings—was going forward. There were not more than twenty people : three or four members of Parliament ; a literary gentleman or two (semi-political also) ; an actor, who was “by way of being a gentleman,” said some of the malicious, but who was a very agreeable person and much admired ; and a few pretty wives and young ladies ; for Lady Jane made all these distinctions. Her “pretty wives and maids” were almost proverbial. Diana had become the prey of one of the Nineveh-bearded gentlemen, who much approved of her, and whom Lady Jane had brought to her, saying “she wished her to like him—so wished her to like him.” That hero, much fancying Diana's *ingénue* air and appearance, and sure that there was about her a refreshing “babble o' green fields,” had laid down his little carpet, and, metaphorically, stripping to his “fleshings,” prepared to give all his most effective “low-rope” acts. But Diana was *distracte*. Her heart was far away ; she was still thinking of the brilliant *feux d'artifice* she had just witnessed ; the colours, the sound of those cascades of yellow and green and blue fire was in her ears,

"The angel ended, and in Adam's ears,  
So charming left his voice."

She did not notice the feats of the agreeable pantomimist who was beside her, and who indeed was so engrossed with his private tumbling that for a short time he did not perceive her want of attention. It broke on him with an almost painful suddenness. He thought her "a bad style" of young girl, with nothing in the world of the "green fields" about her; and rather hurriedly getting on his social greatcoat over his web suit, and bundling up his carpet, he went away to another quarter. "He had not got a copper by his performance," said Mr Wally Pepys, who took his place, and from whom we have indeed borrowed these rather forced histrionic metaphors. To him Diana was generally more attentive. In truth, in her young heart had taken place the change that a certain class of religious experts tells us takes place in the devout. She had been as it were awakened; she saw things so differently; she had at last arrived at the beatific vision—on this earth at least. The habitual flightiness of her young soul seemed to be gone for ever. Quite another Robert Bligh had taken the place of the plain, practical being of the old time. Instead of a homely creature of earth, here was a sort of bright archangel. Again we say, rare, delicious, most exquisite success! How it brightens, how it gilds! It turns the ugly into beauties; it changes contempt into respect and admiration. Those wonderful philosophers, the French, wise and worldly in their most trivial sayings, have summed it all up in a line—"What succeeds like success?" What indeed? What fails like failure? Success means *power*; and therefore we admire and love. We can no more help it, nor could Diana, than we can force our eyes to dislike the soft greens of earth or the soft blues of heaven; and now she is startled from this sort of reverie as the door opens, and the right honourable the Attorney-General enters from the House, bringing in the hero of the evening.

"My dear," he says to Lady Jane, "I got hold of our friend here, and brought him off from our government people."

Lady Jane was delighted. To any one bringing in a new king of beasts to her little menagerie she was grateful.

"You are to be the great man of the day, Mr. Bligh, they tell us. You were really charming to-night. Now, sit down here, and let me talk to you."

Diana noticed a very animated conversation, that went on for many minutes (at little parties of this sort minutes must do for half-hours). Then Lady Jane called over Diana.

"We are turning this orator's head," she said; "but he is not spoiled yet. But, I say, who would conceive he had all this bitterness locked up?"

Thus establishing a connection as it were between two new-charged cylinders, Lady Jane, like an artful hostess, disconnected herself, and went to another quarter.

"I am so glad you liked it," said Bligh ironically, "though indeed they make too much fuss about it. By the way, I am glad I have met you; and, indeed, that was the reason I came in here to-night."

"Oh," said Diana, glowing with pleasure, "how good you are always to me! And I know I don't deserve it."

"Oh dear," said he, "there is no question about that at all; it is merely a matter of duty; and I had hesitation; and—shall I say it?—a good deal of pride was in the way, for after the fashion it was considered I behaved; I say considered—"

A new conviction as well as a new ideal of Mr. Bligh had entered into Diana's heart.

"I never thought of that," she said passionately. "At least I did," she added; "but I was forced to think so; and it seemed so strange, but *now*, I assure—"

"And what, pray," said Mr. Bligh, with some colour mounting into his pale cheeks, "what has caused this change? Has any new fact come before you? Have I vindicated myself? No, I should say not. Miss Diana Gay, you did me cruel injustice, and I had determined

never to condescend to explain or excuse myself, for, give me leave to say, you might have known me far better."

"I deserve all this," said Diana in the same earnest way; "indeed I do."

"But," said he in the same grave tone (Lugard would have said "schoolmaster"), "I felt I should be above all such petty resentment. After all, your dear father was very good to me, and I loved him; and therefore, Miss Gay, to-night I put my pride in my pocket. That expedition to France was not for what you—or I shall say *they*—supposed, but to see my mother—to find out if all I suspected were true. I grieve to say it was true. So far from conspiring against your interest, that interest has lost me the love of the best friend left to me in the world. My mother, as I know well, never goes back from what she says—never recalls speech or promise, and never forgives when she says she will not. In this way I conspired against you."

Now Lady Jane, not relishing a too protracted confidence or isolation among her guests, comes up and says, "Come with me, Mr. Bligh; there's Mrs. Penwilliams dying—you and I have often laughed at that word—dying to know you." But Diana saw Mr. Bligh smile off this proposal. "I must," he said, "let the poor lady expire, and, what I think worse of, disobey you. Reprieve me for ten minutes, Lady Jane."

"So much for that," he said, turning to Diana, "and I shall promise you never to refer to it again."

"Oh, but you must," said Diana; "I could go down here on my knees before you to ask your pardon. It was so unjust—so wicked—I can *never* forgive myself."

She saw him look round in alarm lest she should be heard.

"Do, please, never speak of it again. We both understand now; and I shall promise never to refer to it. Now I have something else to deal with. I am sure you will believe I have a sincere interest in you, and wish only your welfare. Now this trial that is coming on: I am afraid your friends and advisers do not seriously con-

sider the dangers. I do not wish to add to your troubles ; but I am afraid it looks very serious."

"I don't care," said Diana ; "and if you would let me tell you what I wish, let me clear myself, and—"

"It was agreed," he said, "we should never allude to that. It is past. Now, if I might dare advise—and I know a little of the person, Miss Gay, who is the plaintiff here—"

"You do?" said Diana. "When? What is she like?"

"You saw her to-night ; she came up to me in the gallery."

"*That* was she?" said Diana, quite excited ; "and you know her?"

"I see," said he, "you have not quite given up the old suspicions. No matter ; it is only human nature, and what I must expect. Let me tell you, then, I met her on board the packet, and later at the solicitor's, who had sent me a brief in her case, which I returned. You force me to tell you all these things."

Diana still showed disquiet, it seemed to him suspicion.

"And you know her?" she repeated. "She is certainly good-looking, and seems good and nice."

"She is both," he said gravely, "as far as I can judge, and, as far as I can judge, I should say a compromise was possible. She would be willing."

"This she said to you to-night?" asked Diana, with surprising quickness for her.

"Yes."

"I shall never compromise my rights," said Diana with a trembling lip—"never ; and I authorise you to tell her so."

"I have no authority to say this to you, it is only what I gather. Therefore I cannot tell her anything."

"Then we shall leave it so, and, like the other subject, not recur to it again."

"I am certainly a little unfortunate in all my well-meant attempts for your interest."

"Well-meant !" said Diana with a little effort at scorn.

"Yes, well-meant," he repeated gravely. "And now for a third and last bit of advice. I tremble to approach it; but it is really all duty."

"Pray go on," said Diana, scarcely thinking of what she was saying.

"I hardly know how to begin; but as I (think of me as some old reverend friend, which indeed I am fast becoming, you know) hear things at clubs and other places, and so on, I must tell you I think it was a heavy misfortune in many ways that poor Lady Margaret had to break up her establishment."

There was a pause.

"I suppose," said Diana, "you mean a little more than that; but I don't see it."

"Remember," went on Bligh, "I am the old gentleman and friend, lecturing and giving advice. Once this is over, I promise not to trouble you again: indeed, politics bid fair now to become my Mephistopheles. But what I mean is, about your staying with your old friends the Lugards. I think it is injudicious. You are very young; and, forgive me, he is not exactly the sort of person to be your companion and protector."

Diana gave one of her little scornful tosses of the head.

"I understand. But you never liked Richard Lugard."

Robert Bligh rose hastily.

"I have done my part," he said. "I see I was wrong. I had no right to interfere. We must end our long, long conversation; and I wonder what they could have thought of us. The 'dying' Mrs. Penwilliams claims me, and I go. I promise you solemnly it is the last time I shall sin again as to advising."

He nodded pleasantly to her.

"Oh Robert," she cried, "I did not mean—"

But he shook his head in the same pleasant way, as though it were all a joke, and walked away to Mrs. Penwilliams.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### A NIGHT SCENE.

**M**RS. RICHARD LUGARD had long since begun to show signs of ill-health, and kept a good deal to her room. She had grown more excitable too, or rather "more odd," as some of her friends called it. This view was at last forced upon Diana, who had been unwearied in her efforts to soothe her, and followed out her little charitable but foolish scheme of turning that home into a happy one. Having had her own share of troubles, our Diana thought she had begun to learn what the world was very tolerably, and was entitled to give sound advice.

"You see, dear Kitty," she would say to her friend, "I don't think you go quite the right way with Richard; he requires a certain little humouring and leading. You understand?"

Mrs. Lugard would look up at her quickly:

"You know, then, it would seem? You have found it successful?"

Diana, thinking this an earnest though ungracious request for information, would bend forward eagerly and explain her little tactics. When she had dwelt on them some time, and added that she knew Richard's character so well, having known him so long, and that he should be allowed his way in small things, and hinting

that a cheerful smiling welcome was a wonderful reformer, Mrs. Lugard turned quietly to her, and coldly said—

“Why should I take this trouble, when there is a friend ready to come into our house and do it all for me? How good-natured of her, is it not?”

Diana was not a little taken back at this thrust.

“You know you begged of me to come to you,” she said after a moment; “but if you wish—”

“Yes,” said Kitty impatiently, “now be sensitive, and say you will leave the house—leave me to his amiable mercies; that will be charming; as if our house is not yet hell upon earth enough! God knows what scandal will follow then. Yes, yes, you do some good here, even for decency’s sake. But you know me, and you say have known me long, and you cannot make a *little* allowance for what I suffer, and I must carefully measure my words with you even.”

In such scenes, of which there were many patterns, what could Diana do but, with a heart filled with compassion, commiserate her unhappy friend?

When Diana returned home from Lady Jane Williamson’s it was past one o’clock. She came up into the drawing-room bright, smiling, yet half dejected, and found the lamps lit in the drawing-room. Lugard was walking up and down. Diana was a little scared when she saw him, for there was an angry look in his eyes.

“You are very late, Miss Gay,” he said.

“I fear so,” said Diana; “though I did not think it was so late. But, indeed, if I had known you were to wait up—”

“Wait up?” said he; “surely you know that is not so unusual with me. But will you pardon an abrupt question: why did you conceal all this from me?”

“I never meant to conceal anything,” said she, with some pride.

“Oh, I know,” he said, with an ironical bow, “I have no right to bring any young lady to account. But still I have, I think; when you tell me that such a person is

your enemy, and that he has behaved like an enemy, and that you mean to treat him as such, I think some little air of consistency should be kept up, or you should give me notice."

Diana answered eagerly, "Oh, I am so glad to own and discover that we all did him wrong; he has explained everything!"

"Oh, he has? And you listened to his story? But before he told it to you you went to hear him make his exhibition—in *my place* too! Oh, Diana, I did not think you would try such a deception on me."

"I mean no deception, indeed," said Diana gently, for the allusion to "*my place*" had touched her heart, and she felt it must have been a mortification; "only I felt so curious, and I thought at the same time that you might not like to know of Robert's—"

"Robert's!" said he with infinite bitterness; "Robert to the man that has plotted your ruin, that could be had up at this moment before any court, he and his wicked mother, for conspiracy! Page says so; and I tell you we are not done with them yet."

"Oh," said Diana eagerly, "this is what grieves me so. I tell you this is all imagination. He has explained everything. *She* has even cast him off because he took my side. No, Richard, you must not be unjust; and, indeed, we both owe him some *amende* for our treatment."

Richard was growing more excited every moment, striding up and down the room. "Here are fresh and fresh surprises every minute. *Now* I begin to see. All this time, from ever so far back, you have been devoted to that—fellow, while I, poor fool that I have been, have let all my prospects, all my hopes in life, be destroyed running after a mere phantom."

This language, which might have alarmed another lady, seemed to Diana merely a development of Lugard's usual intemperate strain, meaning nothing beyond general discontent and anger. Yet she had not seen him so excited for long, and tried to soothe him.

"Don't talk in this way, you make me so unhappy ; and you know I have troubles of my own."

"And what troubles have I had?—though no one thinks of that. Disappointed, mortified, deceived, and I can trace it all to one, one thing. If *you* had—"

"Dear Richard," said Diana, a little alarmed, "it is no use talking of that now ; you know I have told you so again and again."

"It is no use for *you*, of course. My career is ended ; yours is beginning. It falls very light on you ; but I warn you, Diana, do not think of *that*, or let it near you, for there is a point beyond which I will not be trifled with ; so I warn him, or you may warn him if you like. I may bear what I *have* to bear as well as I can, and as I must ; but take care, Diana, for it would be the most fatal day for *him* since he was born, if you were to think of *that*. I tell you plainly I could not bear *that*."

He was so wild and strange that Diana shrank away ; and yet she pitied him, he had been so harassed ; and she could not find it in her heart to take up that tone of dignity, or affect an air that "she ought not to listen." She had not the strength, in fact, to take up the bold or haughty part. But she attempted a faint protest : "We are old friends, I know, Richard ; we have known each other from children—you from a boy, I from a girl—so that—"

"So that I am quite harmless, and what I say is all folly and nonsense ? Then I tell you, Diana Gay, I take no such view, and I hold you responsible for all this wretchedness. You made a sort of plaything of me—it was all your sport—and would carry on the sport now, and you do not care."

"Hush, hush !" said she, "you must not speak in this way. Indeed, it is time that I should leave this house, for I seem to have failed in doing what I hoped to do—to make you more happy and reconciled to your state."

He again gave a loud and bitter laugh. "Oh, that was it ? Oh, indeed !"

"But, now," said Diana, growing excited, "I see my

folly and childishness, and that I ought not to remain here an hour longer ; and they were right."

"*They* were right?" he repeated. "I see at last. Then he has been advising you—he has dared to tell you this? He will drive me mad, this fellow! What business has he to interfere? But, never fear, I'll make him account to me. And so he has persuaded you to leave us? Well, do. Give him that triumph, you cruel, unsteady girl. Leave us, then, and I know what I shall do. I shall know with whom to reckon first of all, and then what to do with myself. Yes, Diana. This life is getting unendurable ; I am in that state of mind that I know not what I shall do ; harassed on all sides, miserable, you know not what I suffer. It only wants *that*—your leaving us—and you shall see what will follow."

"No matter now," said Diana, eager to end this interview ; "we will talk of this in the morning."

"As you will, Diana ; but mind, *if you leave us, I leave also.*"

Diana started, and gave a cry. There was one else, also, who had started ; and in the doorway they saw the tail figure of Kitty wrapped in a shawl, her face pale and menacing. Diana, on whom the whole effect of this fatal situation now flashed, ran to her ; the other sternly waved her back.

"So you will leave," she said to him, "if she leaves? Thank God I have heard these words. For long I have known that you wished me to leave—leave this world, if I could."

"Oh, it was very cruel of him," said Diana passionately, "and wicked to speak so ! And I appeal to you, Richard, to bear me out ; I never wished to listen to you, or to encourage this in the least ; say so, speak, and do that justice."

It was curious to see the change now that she was in presence of this dramatic situation. The *danger*—the crisis, as it seemed to her, so new and desperate—had given her an unwonted purpose and strength of mind. Her eyes flashed, she seemed to have grown of a sudden

years older in heart and purpose. The childish Diana had been transformed.

Lugard looked at her gloomily, and did not reply for a moment. "I do not care who knows it, and there is no need for any acting here. I have not patience for it; and it is only carrying out a farce to pretend anything of the sort. *She* knows," he said, pointing to his wife, "what I feel, and what I have felt all through."

"Stop, stop!" said Diana passionately, to whom every moment brought a fresh revelation; "how can you be so cruel, so wicked?"

These words seemed only to make Lugard more desperate.

"Ah, you say this now, Diana, after all the mischief is done. Who is it that has been most cruelly dealt with, I should ask? Who has been sacrificed? I say again, *she* knew all this; and there is no injury done to her, because her eyes were open. I am *sick* of acting parts, and it is more honest to say the truth out boldly. She knows, and she knew then, that I wanted to marry *you*, Diana, and that—"

"And that," said the Kitty Crowder of old times, in a trembling, scornful voice, "and that, if one obstacle were out of the way, you would do. It is more honest to speak the truth, is it not?"

Diana again broke out in the most passionate terms, "Oh, *now* I see at last; now my eyes are opened! Richard, to think you should have been so wicked! Oh, let me go; let me fly from this dreadful house; it will kill me to remain a moment longer here. But where shall I go? What is to become of me?"

"And what is to become of *me*?" said he, advancing to the door. "If I am left here to this life—no, no, if you leave, take care, Diana; I don't know what will follow. And if you leave in anger—I say, take care again—take care, for I cannot answer for myself."

Here was something dramatic for the young heroine. The time was an hour past midnight—the actors, that excited wife and the wilder husband, as it seemed to Diana,

She was so shocked, so confounded, at all these new discoveries, she did not know what to do, and could only murmur, "What is to become of me? Where shall I go? Oh, to whom shall I go?"

Not one of the party had perceived that the maid-servant had entered and had spoken. She said again, "This gentleman wishes—" But she was as confounded as any of the rest, for she had heard the last two speeches.

Suddenly Lugard started forward furiously. "He come here! Oh, this passes beyond all! He is at the bottom of all, and—Heaven above!—the time has come for me to punish him."

It was Robert who was standing in the doorway. He entered calmly and slowly.

"First," he said, "to explain my presence here at your house. It is for her—Miss Gay's—interest that I am here. A discovery I have just made is to her case of the greatest importance, and I thought a moment should not be lost—"

"And you have the insufferable effrontery," said Lugard, really beside himself, and advancing on the other with fury, "to meddle in this business, though you have been warned? I tell you, man, this is going too far, and I cannot control myself. You will drive me to do you a mischief."

"Folly!" said Bligh, half contemptuously. "I also am tired of this hectoring, which has gone on far too long.—Miss Gay, you asked where can you go to from this house? I shall tell you. Mr. Bowman and Lady Margaret have returned this evening, and are at their hotel—Starridge's. You can go there at once; I will leave you there myself if you wish."

"Yes, yes, Robert; a thousand times yes;" and she went over to him.

Lugard strode forward, then checked himself, as he saw Diana cling to Robert's arm, and actually ground his teeth with fury. "Do as you please, then," he said to her; "I can't control you; but as for *him*, if I live another hour

he shall pay me the long debt he owes me—nearly twenty years now—and with interest, too, Mr. Bligh.”

Bligh was going, but he turned back, and said calmly, “And let me warn you, too, that the day for forbearance—which you in your wicked dulness set down to fear of you—has passed by. Take care, for I shall treat you now in quite a different manner.—Come, Miss Gay.”

They passed down, and entered his carriage at the door. Neither spoke, but there was on their minds an impression of the dreadful situation. They left behind them that husband and wife, whose household gods were shattered about them, strewing the floor, a universal wreck of marriage, respect, love, happiness—everything—the very fragments of which to-morrow might break up in yet further ruin.

Bligh hurriedly told her how her friends had so opportunely returned, Lady Margaret something better in health. As for the matter concerning the business, he said he would see her in the morning. Indeed, Diana cared little : the scene she had passed through had changed her into a woman. Down had tumbled the thick walls of simplicity, unsophistication, pleasant unconcern, that enclosed the rural garden in which she had been living ; and she saw about her, grown up as if by enchantment, the great streets and buildings of life, the hum of traffic, the passing faces, the bustling figures—and not only saw but understood them, like the Eastern in the fairy tale whose head was dipped into the tub of water. The whole scenery of a life seemed to pass through her young brain. She saw the dream in which she had been living—the height, depth, thickness, the philosophy, above all, the folly of that strange intimacy. She now even shrank from it with terror. In the carriage as they went along she poured out her faltering gratitude to “her preserver and old friend,” as she called him. Bligh was clam and grateful, but cold as usual. It was a mere accident his coming in at that moment. He, and he always hoped to prove that he would be a real friend, he had had a note that night from Hawker, Q.C., who led on the other side, and who told him that Judge Cosherer had fixed Wednesday for the case,



"I don't care about the case," said Diana impatiently ; "but you had something else to tell me."

"It was about the case also," he said. "When I got home and took up the evening paper, the *Regent Street Chronicle*, I saw a paragraph about this business, in which they said that some Rev. Mr. Potter who was chaplain there was to be examined. The name made me start, for it seemed quite familiar to me, and I tried to recollect for a long time. At last I recalled it. Do you remember my looking through your papers at Gay Court?"

"Indeed I do," said she.

"Well it was there. There were some letters from abroad, some from my mother, some from others ; but the name I could swear to and some passage not very favourable to him. I did not read it, but I know my eye fell on it. I would get those papers looked into at once. They ought to have been looked to before."

Diana was not attending very much. She was thinking of the scene they just witnessed. Now they were at the yellow front of Starridge's private and distinguished hotel in Brook Street. Its lamps were shining out over the door. "Lady Margaret Bowman and suite" were arrived, and her ladyship had just sent over to Mr. Lugard's a note for Miss Gay. She went in, and she said "goodbye" to Bligh. She added softly, "Oh, how kind you have been ! I shall never forget."

As he turned to go, he thought he would walk home. It was a moonlight night—the night of a most delightful and exciting day. "He had conducted *that* case well"—the triumph in the House, the conversation with Diana, and that half-rescue with which all had closed. He was thinking as he lighted his cigar, "She will be a *true* woman yet. It will work itself out." He then repeated, half aloud, as he set off,

"Yes, better let her work it out for herself, and I shall say and do nothing."

At this moment a figure crossed the street hurriedly ; a hansom cab was driving away, from which it had descended. The figure was in front of him in a moment : a fierce face—wild eyes as of a madman.

"Now, Mr. Bligh," it said; "*now* there are no women to protect you."

Bligh threw away his cigar and drew back.

"I told you before I am getting tired of this, and that I have passed the point when I can put up with it longer."

"Who wishes you to put up with it?" said the other in a low voice. "I would ask nothing better than that you should not. You have just hit the nice point, Mr. Special Pleader, clever as you are."

Bligh spoke with great firmness.

"Go away," he said. "Leave me. I see you wish to bring about some—I don't say quarrel—"

"Quite right, Mr. Bligh, the great barrister and member—quite so. I do wish to bring it to that, here, and in this street—a common vulgar quarrel—police and all that."

Bligh looked round. The long decent street was almost deserted: on the other side the faint pattering of the steps of a passenger going home, and not concerned with the two gentlemen who were talking together opposite.

Bligh suddenly got past him, and then, putting him back with his hands, said—

"Once for all, understand this. Your conduct to me for so many years has been past endurance. Your insults, your unworthy jealousies and sneers, your more unworthy slanders behind my back"—and Robert's voice trembled—"I tell you all that is past now; so take and go your way. Let me go mine."

"What talk is this!" said Lugard, now furious. "Take your hands off me. As if I had nothing to put up with from your mean, quiet sneaking ways all these—But I'll end it now. You shall meet me in France—anywhere you please—but meet me you shall. Do you hear?"

"No," said the other. "I shall do nothing of the kind. There is my answer."

"*And there's mine, you coward!*" said Lugard, and

swiftly raising his arm, his hand descended as swiftly towards the cheek of Robert Bligh.

It was just the scene with which this little romance opened at Dr. Wheeler's, now so many years before ; but between, what an abyss of stormy passions, in one breast at least, had filled up ! Before that angry hand had descended, another stout arm had been launched out in defence, and had struck it up with such violence that Richard reeled again, and, staggering back, with difficulty kept his feet. Bligh stood, still calm, his hands ready, and without speaking a word.

"You struck me," said Lugard wildly. "You shall pay for this—by God you shall !"

"Take care, I warn you," repeated Bligh, in a low voice.

As Lugard was rushing on again, a policeman came out of an archway close by.

"Now, gents, what's this about ? Here, I say—"

"He struck me ! He did ! I swear it ! I'll charge him before any magistrate ! I do it now."

"Hush, hush !" said Bligh. "You are beside yourself." Then to the policeman, "This gentleman and I were once friends, and he wishes now to draw me into a quarrel. He followed me here in a cab. I am Mr. Bligh, a member of Parliament—"

This title was to Lugard like scarlet on a furious bull.

"I charge him here, whatever he is, and you must do your duty. I shall appear against him at the police—"

"Why, I see you strike him first," said the policeman, "and see you get out of the cab and cross the street. I was a-watching you, ay and see the 'ansom come up. Come, go about your business. Now, see here, you won't come this way ; so you may as well now. I'll take care, sir," added the policeman, touching his hat, "he shan't trouble you. I see you myself in the Chancellor's Court ; so I know it's true what you says, sir."

No wonder that Bligh almost felt pity for his enemy's degraded situation. He stopped irresolutely and said—

"Lugard, no one need know anything of this. But for

your own sake I conjure you to give over this insane course of yours."

"I shall reach you yet," said Lugard, grinding his teeth, "though you do require police and women to protect you."

"A hinformation in the morning before Mr. Bond 'll be your course, sir," said the policeman—"bind him over, you know."

Bligh walked away slowly, and Lugard went off in the other direction, the policeman following him, and determined to "keep his eye on him" till he got home. Some evil spirit seemed to have entered to this man, whom "the gods seemed determined to destroy." The furies of life were against him, and everything seemed bent on defeating him.





## CHAPTER XIV.

GAY V. GAY.

**B**Y the next morning the baffled Richard Lugard was almost in a state of phrenzy. Those who were in his house heard him walking about talking to himself, nearly the whole night. Had they been listening they would have heard him saying:—"Oh! show me some way. Let me live to destroy him! It will drive me mad if I do not!" But the chief blow had come from Diana. "That *she* should have turned on!—oh, to scold me so cruelly, all at the persuasion of this *clerk*—that lawyer's drudge! I'll never forgive her—never!" With the next morning came a letter, the writing of which he knew to be hers. She too had been thinking over that scene, not without trouble and alarm. They were her old friends, and to Richard—with all his violence and ill-conditioned behaviour—she could not feel much resentment. She indeed regarded him as irresponsible. To that class of character, indeed, a girl's heart is unconsciously indulgent. Called on *officially* to sentence such a one, they are bound to be severe, but they think of the prisoner with interest. There were the dangers also with such a nature lest he should proceed to some violence; and, after all, he had been kind to her, and had really liked her, and liked her long. So she sat down and wrote him a long letter

setting out all these things, saying how grateful she was for his goodness and the shelter he had given her ; that, as for what he had said, she knew he was hasty and thoughtless, and did not think what he was going to do. But if he ever did like her, she was going to ask him a favour. She had her own troubles drawing on, and she knew he would not wish to add to them, and this was that there should not be any quarrel between him and Robert Bligh. When he came to this point he half crushed up the letter.

"She wishes to protect him," he said, "but it will not do."

Presently he read on. She must know what people would say, and how her name would be drawn into it.

Almost as early, another letter reached him. He knew *that* hand also. His eyes lighted up, and he saw with a sort of exultation. "No, surely ! But he has not spirit enough for that. He dare not. This is more of his wretched quibbling." It was from Robert Bligh.

He said after the scene of last night it was quite necessary they should come to a clear understanding as to Lugard's future behaviour. They had been old friends and schoolfellows, and he appealed to Lugard himself, if for all these years past he had not shown a temper and patience few other men would have exhibited. "Yes," said Lugard, "because he could not help it—he hadn't the spirit." But they had now—since last night—passed the point of this endurance ; he would bear no more, and he was obliged to give Richard Lugard this warning. Perhaps it would not be attended to on these grounds : but there was another reason which might have more effect—the name of one whom they both knew well would of certainty be drawn into it, if there was any scandal or any quarrel. On Lugard's head would rest that responsibility ; and though he knew the motive that would be ascribed to this appeal, he was content to let such be ascribed to him, provided it had effect. Again, he said he was not hostile to Richard Lugard, and could even try and forget his unprovoked behaviour of last

night, and would be glad to serve him. But let them give over these childish bickerings and jealousies, which were really unworthy of grown men as they were. He made this last appeal, and did so in the name of one whom they both regarded.

It may be imagined what the effect of this appeal was on Richard, with what scorn and fury he read every word; yet somehow he felt himself entangled in the logic of it, and it forced itself disagreeably on him, that any *esclandre* would of course involve Diana's name. From this feeling he could not set himself free. The whole of that day he wandered about uncertain—now finding himself drawn to the House of Commons by a sort of fascination, to wait for his rival and enemy. But at last, and before the end of the day, he found a weary relief in thinking that as Diana's case was now coming on, he might at least wait for a few days. And so he determined to do. He would postpone all vengeance and conflict until that was over.

But now the great case was at last drawing on. The affidavits, and additional affidavits, had been "filed;" all the usual excuses for delays, and the motions had been exhausted. It was "ripe" for trial; and though the *venue* would naturally have been laid upon the circuit to which Calthorpe belonged, still obvious reasons made both parties concur in selecting the little assize town of Bentham as the battle field. These arrangements the public learned from the *Regent Street Chronicle*, which one evening set before its readers the following little hot buttered roll:—

"Lovers of what are called 'sensation trials' will be rejoiced to learn from us, that the great bath into which they have been longing to plunge is at last nearly ready. Their slumbers will be of the sweetest when they hear that the case goes down for trial to Bentham, that it will have all the impartiality and acumen—we believe these are the correct words of judicial compliment—of Mr. Justice Coshorer, and that of course a high-minded and intelligent jury will receive his lordship's instructions,

The *Bentham Gazette* will, of course, crowd its columns, and the evening penny papers will, as the phrase runs, drive a roaring trade, &c."

The *Regent Street Chronicle* was right. At last, like a great ship, the case was ready for launching. With infinite pains the instructors had every rivet driven home, every bolt closed. Both parties were ready, witnesses, counsel, pleadings. The "circuit" was moving slowly down on Bentham. Mr. Justice Cosherer said very often at dinner, "we have a very heavy ejection at Bentham." Or in court, when "sitting," "you know, Brother Hawker, we have that Bentham case."

At last, Diana's gentle breast was still more fluttered by a note from Mr. Page, saying that it would be taken on Monday, and that he was going down to-morrow, with all the papers. Then, indeed, she felt a chill. There had been many reprieves, and the fatal day seemed a long way off; now it had come at last. It was actually the morning fixed. The witnesses were in town: the court was crowded, the gallery was filled with ladies, and the sheriff had been giving out tickets. It was quite a festival for Bentham, where, as the barristers who went that circuit remarked, "there was never anything heavier than a few wretched larcenies," the bystander naturally concluding it was some mean, wretched, semi-barbarous spot. Our old friend, the *Calthorpe Mercury*, which had filled many a column with the glories of the House of Gay, had now sent a special reporter—"our own"—to chronicle its downfall. This faithless journal was always trimming its sails to the new and more favouring gales. "We understand," it said, "that the *probable owner* of Gay Court, that is, if we are to trust those who are best likely to form an opinion on the matter, is a young lady of gay French tastes, who will make a most desirable addition to the county. The new family—should a jury of Bentham lieges so decree it—are determined to seize the opportunity to restore to Gay Court some of its old attractions. As we have been told, it is the eye of the master makes the horse grow fat, and on the same prin-



ciple, it is *the residence of the owner* that is the true source of the prosperity of this vast empire, on which the sun never sets." Some of the malicious creatures who "adhere" to country towns and villages—a mortified doctor's wife, who had *not* been asked to Gay Court on some occasion, or a shopkeeper's daughter, who had not been recognised—cut this paragraph out and sent it to Diana. This mean behaviour on the part of the *Mercury* had the effect desired, and "mortified" her more than any stroke had done as yet. Those people, whom her father had fed, and whom, indeed, he had once assisted when the presses, types, &c., were about to be seized for a debt to paper-makers, thus to turn on her! But, as we have seen, she was learning every hour the true character of the world, and these rough and rather cruel lessons were doing her a world of good.

On the incidents of this rather remarkable action, which attracted a good deal of attention at the time, it is not proposed to dwell minutely. The *Mercury* had it all in quite dramatic shape—the dialogue, the question and answer, all "textually" given. Telegrams, indeed, reached Calthorpe during the day, detailing its progress; the *Mercury* issued a special edition: they had even taken on another man, an addition, happily described as "*having specially increased our present large staff.*"

Hawker led for the plaintiff, and opened her case in a speech of remarkable ability. It lasted over an hour, and he took the jury during that space over the whole ground. Then came the witnesses. There were formal witnesses—people brought at great charges from France, bringing the books of the consulate. Everything was clear. There was the marriage, on such a day, and in such a year, between the actress and the English officer, under his proper name—not Burgess, but Gay. Everything *en règle*—witnesses and all. Then there was the examination of the old French nun "by commission," proving the reception of the young girl, Eugenie, the visit of the strange lady, and the payment of money. Then there was a sensation, as a pimpled, red-faced, elderly man, with a

white cloth about his neck, came into the box. Every one knew this was the clergyman. The marriage was all regular—he remembered it perfectly. This, of course, had been already proved by the registry, but he had known young Gay, had been an intimate friend; and he proved many other incidental matters. He remembered the birth of the girl. He was severely cross-examined “as to his antecedents” by Diana’s counsel, and certainly made a lamentable figure. He, however, candidly owned that he had not strength to resist; that he was fond of pleasures, and very poor, and had to get on as he could. Now, before his acquaintance with Mr. Gay how had he lived? Come now, out with it all—he might as well. The frankness of this man was, however, his defence. He kept nothing back. He had been chaplain of this place and that. Well, he had, he confessed it,—he *had* been dismissed. They said the accounts of the English chapel were confused. Was there not some awkward imputation of—let us say stealing, or embezzlement? He owned it, but he defied any man to say it has been proved. Why? Because they couldn’t. Why again? Because there were people there who had made a party—against him. Why, the third time, hadn’t it been proved? Was it because he had fled the night before the investigation? Well, he owned it, because he knew he would not get fair play. A vast deal of time was consumed in dealing with this gentleman, the process, as in many cases, being most amusing, and even dramatic, for the idle and unconcerned spectators, but, in truth, having little bearing on the case.

Hawker sat down, after a “masterly cross-examination,” and even to applause which was “with difficulty suppressed by the Court.” Then the Court went to lunch, and it was known that a veiled lady, whom they saw under the Bench, was Mrs. Bligh, who was to be the next witness.

In the box she put up her veil, and looked round the court from Justice Cosherer to the ladies’ gallery, regarding them all with a cold, hard look, that did not gain her much sympathy. She was defiant and haughty, but those from about Calthorpe who were present noticed a start-

ling change in her. How worn she was, and how her eyes flashed and burned with a glowing fire! Her story was simple and unexaggerated, and, in the main, a repetition of what she had told her son. She told it all with infinite clearness, and fashioned it herself into a most full and dramatic narrative. Then counsel rose to cross-examine—an operation it was expected would be performed with more than usual ferocity—so dangerous a witness must be broken down at all hazards; and when the barrister rose, drawing his gown up on his shoulders, as it were to free his arms for the struggle, a flutter and rustle of expectancy ran round. She, too, seemed to count on this, for her lips were compressed together firmly, and she seemed to wait the first blow with a cold and hard defiance. But, to the universal surprise, there was no “hostile” cross-examination—mere explanation was asked for. Why had she kept these matters back so long? Had she not known the Gays—had they not been friends in fail? She turned full to the judge and to the whole Court, and said, “I am glad I have been asked that question. We *were* the greatest friends. But I conceive, whether rightly or wrongly, that I have been deeply injured by one of them, and then I felt myself discharged. I felt—and I own it candidly here—I wished that some punishment could be found for such behaviour.”

Richard Lugard, who had been in Court all the day, now stooped over, and, pulling the barrister by his gown, whispered to him. The barrister shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and waved him off. Mrs. Bligh went on, “I want no concealment in the matter. The Court is welcome to know my motives and reason. The world is quite welcome to them.”

“You must reserve your reasons, madam,” said the judge; “we shall not trouble you.”

Again Lugard touched the barrister, who said aloud, angrily, “I must beg you, sir, to sit down, and not interrupt me. No one wishes to have your motives, Mrs. Bligh—as for the Christianity or morality of such conduct, I thought—”

"For that I am not accountable to you," said she, quickly. "I have offered to justify myself, and you will not listen. Is it *your* legal morality to make an insinuation then?"

The judge smiled.

"It is open to you to comment on it in your speech, but the witness is right in what she says—"

"Ask me, and I shall keep back nothing, I promise you that."

The barrister, somewhat nettled, replied, "That's all melodramatic enough, madam. I ask what I am instructed to ask, and no more."

There were one or two other witnesses, and this simple case closed. As the counsel said in his speech, "they had" the fact that Mr Gay had an elder brother; that that elder brother had married, and had children, and there was the child, the plaintiff. The case of the defendant was merely a speech—they called no witnesses—he could only comment on the "shady" character of the witnesses, and then made a rather remarkable statement as to Mrs. Bligh. They had that lady's evidence, he said, but as men of the world they would see there was more behind it than they were allowed to examine into. For himself, he would merely say that no doubt they had been surprised at the temperate and forbearing tone of his cross-examination. But there were reasons for all these matters, and he would merely add that he had been left to his own discretion—

Here Hawker "must interpose." They had nothing whatever to do with his learned friend's discretion, granting there was such a thing. (Here loud laughter in Court.) They were not to go speculating as to evidence that had not been given.

The learned friend said he was perfectly entitled to comment on the strange exhibition of open malignity they had seen that day, shocking and unchristian as it appeared to them all. He had a right to ask the jury to apply their minds in finding a solution for that hostility.

"I think not," said Mr Justice Cosherer; "you had

not the opportunity, and you did not avail yourself of it."

The barrister said, very well; it was of no consequence, and had very little bearing on the case, a common declaration with gentlemen of the long robe when defeated on a vital point. He then warmed himself up for the usual circuit platitudes, got on an effective picture of "the dismantled mansion—the deserted hearth, and the ejected young mistress, turned out on the world, full of her youth and beauty." After about an hour's galloping across this sort of country, he at last drew reins, and got off his oratorical nag very heated and exhausted. Then came the reply, which, following out the same metaphor, was a mere cool amble in the shade, and on a cob. It was, in short, in a tone of quiet good sense, practical and plain, the best, in short, after some such impassioned display—as it were, making us all feel ashamed of having been led away by our feelings. Of course it was all very well to talk of a dismantled mansion and a blighted hearth. And then this common sense, which his learned friend had brought down with him in his bag, like his Archbold's *Nisi Prius*—and he must do him that justice, no one used them better, as his lordship and they all knew, who came that circuit. But they were all men of common sense. He knew his learned friend had an article called *uncommon sense* (*laughter*), for which he had the exclusive patent (*renewed laughter*), so exclusive that he would not allow him, or the jury there, or even his lordship, to use this valuable invention (*loud laughter, in which the Court joined*).

*Mr Justice Coshener*: "And he has also patented his discretion" (*roars of laughter, sustained for many minutes*).

After order had been restored the learned gentleman asked, "What was the fact now? They all knew something of the world. Now, who was going to dismantle Gay Court?—who was going to smash up the hearth-stones and ranges in the way depicted by his friend? Why, the fact was, his client was going down there

to live—if the jury would give her leave, which he was confident they would—and he could reassure his learned friend, who seemed so nervously anxious about the kitchen fire (*loud laughter*)—that if he might use the expression, high jinks would forthwith set in there. He might promise him his little interest to secure him an invitation. (*Roars of laughter.*) Why, what talk was this! If he was informed rightly, the place had been deserted already by the defendant, who, it seems, was a young lady of high fashion, and went to balls and parties in London—things about which, he, thank God, found nothing in his law books, though his learned friend might. (*Laughter.*) He frankly confessed he wouldn't know a polka from a poker. (*Laughter.*) His learned friend was well up in these matters; and, he was told, could waltz like an angel—(*roars of laughter*)—an odd sort of angel he must have looked, with his wig bobbing about—(*laughter*)—to the music, and his gown flapping out behind him—(*laughter*),—or mixed up with the ladies—(*laughter*),—while his legs joined in the demurrer, and would be set aside with costs. (*Roars of laughter, the learned judge being literally convulsed.*) “No one,” said the *Mercury*, “seemed to enjoy the fun more than the learned counsel who was the subject of this diverting picture.” At last he concluded, and then Mr. Justice Cosherer, pulling in his chair, and arranging his papers, proceeded to charge the jury in a voice which, after the learned counsel's rolling tones, seemed to be in the next street.





## CHAPTER XV.

### VERDICT.

**R**OBERT BLIGH was busily engaged all that day. There was a delicate Puisne Judge anxious to retire, and it was said that the Solicitor-General was anxious for the post. It was understood that if the arrangement could be carried out, the young member who had made the brilliant speech was very likely to get the vacant Law Officership; the wish, too, of Sir John Williamson was already known. He was in "heavy" cases this day, and had had an interview with various spaniels, carrier-pigeons, turnspits, whips, and other functionaries who are so useful to a party; yet his thoughts were all on the trial then going on down at the little circuit town. But he got a telegram, as was arranged between him and Mr. Page.

"We have made no case — judge charging dead against us—jury seemed made up."

As soon as he got leisure, he wrote a hasty note to Diana :—

"MY DEAR DIANA,—The case is going on; but you must, as I told you before, not buoy yourself up with much hope. Be prepared for the worst, and then you will be prepared for the best. The result will be known in about an hour, when I shall come and tell it to you. —Yours, R. B."

She was sitting at Starridge's, with Lady Margaret, who was still quite helpless, and never again to force her way through the fashionable ranks. When Diana received this, she was quick-witted enough to understand—"He is preparing me for the worst," she thought. "Well, God's will be done. Before night I suppose I shall be a beggar!"

She got up quietly. Lady Margaret had lost her old restless curiosity, which made her ask about every letter that came to the house, "Who is that from? what is it?"—and she made no remark. Diana went down to the room below, and sat there to read the letter again. Now it had all come home to her at last: *now* she understood: this was the sentence, and it seemed to her a sentence. "I suppose it is a fair punishment," she said; "I was so frivolous and fitful, and going through life like a mere child. That could not go on; and my selfishness was to be punished. Well, heaven's will be done." Mr. Bowman came in, and she showed him the letter. He read it, and shook his head. "I know what that means," he said. "When my poor sister was taken off, that's the way the doctor wrote to me. You poor, poor little woman, my heart bleeds for you. But you know as well as I do, where your home is to be now: with old Bowman, that loves you like his child. My pet, we'll make it up to you; and, please God, I can do something in the way of settlement too; and with your own child's portion—two thousand pounds—we'll make out something snug."

Diana was deeply touched, and went up to him, and silently kissed him; but she had her own resolution formed.

"I must go up," he said, "and sit a bit with poor Maggie, and invent some news for her. Look here, I've got all the back numbers of the *Court Journal*. Why, there's a month's reading here."

Diana sat there for nearly an hour longer. It grew dark. She was trying to look her situation straight in the face. But it was very hard. "I must try and bear it,"



she said aloud ; " and perhaps I shall find strength to bear it."

" Yes, dear Diana," said a low voice close beside her, " you will want all your little strength. Just think : riches are not everything in this world."

She took Robert's hand, and held it. " Then it is over?" she asked, faltering ; " and against me?"

" Yes!" he said. " I knew how it would be. I was afraid from the very beginning. It is very, very hard—such heavy blows falling on one so young and so weak!"

His sympathy and compassion in these words touched her ; or was rather the occasion that set free all her secret emotion ; she burst into tears, and wept silently for some moments.

" Now, you must not," said he, in an expressive, soft, and kindly tone. " Sit down here, and let me talk. I must tell you about this miserable business—better to know it all at once. Yes, it is over ; the jury found against us—the judge charged against us ; and, from what I understand of it, I fear there is no hope for any future proceeding. It is at an end. This is cruel speaking ; is it not?"

" I know you mean it for the best, and it is the kindest course. Oh dear, dear Gay Court, so I have now lost you for ever ! Oh, dear darling papa ; thank God for one blessing ! that you are not alive for this stroke !"

" Yes," he repeated, slowly, " Gay Court is theirs. And, oh ! that I should have to say it to you, Diana—you have no home ! You must think now what you will do for the present. Will you accept Mr. Bowman's offer ? You should. There is no compliment in it. You have done much for them."

" No, no, Robert," said Diana, drying her eyes, and standing, " I shall be independent to the last. I shall go away to France—to some distant country, far away from this dreadful place. I shall have a hundred a year, they tell me. It ought to do—many poor creatures have less."

" Not for you, Diana," he said. " Impossible ! you have been brought up to luxury, recollect."

"Then I shall learn to work—work for my bread; which I should have learned long ago."

Again he looked down. "One like you would earn little. You are too slight to work."

"Then I shall die," said Diana, vehemently; "the dearest thing that can happen. You do not encourage me; but I know you mean well."

"Yes," he said, calmly; "and I wish, at this moment, you should know all that is before you, so that you can choose fairly. There is one other thing I heard to-day, which ought to be mentioned to you."

"More misery," said Diana; "I don't care, indeed—"

"Not at all," he said; "you remember that Lord Patmore. I have reason to know that he has been in an unsettled way, and that he heartily repents having displeased you. I always said there was good in him, and that he had an honest heart, only overlaid with a weight of fashionable conceits and selfishness which prevented it working. A word would bring him here again. At least I'm confident—"

"Not if I starved or died!" said she, proudly. "And *you* propose this to me—you, Robert—"

"Then there is only one thing more for me to suggest. I have exhausted everything else. Yet you will receive it in the same way?"

"No, indeed," said she, putting out her hand.

"But you must hear to the end. I was thinking last night how long it is since we began to know each other; how far off it now seems since the time you used to come to Doctor Wheeler's; and how much has taken place since. My life has been tolerably monotonous, except during the last few months; but still you would be surprised, Diana, if you knew how much you have coloured it—directly and indirectly."

She hesitated. "Well, I dare say that was what used to be in those old pleasant days; but latterly, during the last few years, you have changed a good deal to me, Robert."

"No!" he said, smiling; "I have always been the same—"

"But," said she, "I mean you have changed, and I know the reason. You had an ideal of me. You thought as I grew up I would get steady. I have a purpose in life. But you were disappointed, and I seemed to you to be a child still. Ah! I found that out, Robert; though I was too proud to let you know that I felt it a little."

"I was always the same," he repeated; "always liked and admired you."

"Not for this year or two, or you would not have neglected us so—given us up for these new friends and fashionable young ladies, to whom the world gives you out. And since you have become successful, too, and since the time when the first rumours of this fatal suit—"

"You do me some little injustice," he said; "though it is since the time of this fatal suit that I began to change in a certain sense. Yes, Diana, cold as I have appeared—selfish, too, perhaps—I have always secretly thought of you, and of you only. But you were far above me in every way—far. In wealth, in mind—everything."

"Oh, Robert."

"For this hour, shall I confess it, I have been waiting. Now I can speak. Now, at least, I may have the happiness of offering to share all I have, and all I shall have, with you. I own I have latterly been acting a part. For a time—that was long ago—I had some hope that you had a regard for me. Then I thought this mere folly, and that of such a thing you never even dreamed. Later, again, I saw that I had indeed done you injustice—cruel injustice. Now, Diana, let me offer myself and all I have, and you will think no more of this misfortune.

Her face lit up with pleasure and delight.

"Oh, Robert! How shall I ever thank you? How generous, kind, and forgiving! And to wait for this moment! Never, never shall I forget this! Indeed you are far above me. I am still a foolish, childish creature, though I hope to mend one of these days; and they tell me I am improving a little. But—but this can never be, Robert—never!"

"Never be! Oh, Diana!"

"Impossible! Never! I am determined. Call it pride—anything, Robert. No; I have fixed on my new course of life already. And I tell you this, too, Robert: you must not think it is because I do not like you. No; if you had asked me the same question some time ago, I should have answered very differently. You I always liked, Robert, and liked *better than any one else*, even so far back as Doctor Wheeler's days. But now it cannot be. Goodbye, Robert; come and see me and advise me."

He was silent for a moment.

"I think I understand now. I shall not say a word; but I did not expect this. If you would think it over a little; as I have waited so long, I can wait some time longer."

"It would be no use, Robert," said Diana, firmly. "I am determined on this course. My path is taken; and I shall do as I know my own dear darling would wish me to do. I must suffer my share and pay the penalty. So promise me, dear Robert, never to mention this again."

"Well," said Robert, sadly, "when in court I see the judge against me, they say I never push the matter, and so I shall leave it now."

With an assumed cheerfulness, which, however, seemed genuine to Diana, he rose, and withdrew slowly.

Then Diana felt a complete blankness and desolation, with nothing to sustain her but the rather desperate sacrifice she had made. Such little pride as there is in such proceedings lasts but a short time, and begins to grow weaker. To have any satisfaction, these efforts require the presence of spectators, the lights, the scenery; then there is some indemnity.

There she sat, on that fatal night of the most fatal day in her little day, in one of the grand drawing-rooms at Starridge's; a home, indeed, far above her means, as she felt now. Poor, beggared, ruined little Diana! It was a cruel fate, and some of the old people said "enough to make her father leap out of his grave."

Everything was lost to her—wealth, love, hope—to name them in their proper *worldly* order. What had

been life to her was fading out, for to those born and brought up, if not in the purple, at least in the "fine linen" and silks and velvets of life, all these decorations and this magnificence is as conventional as a fine landscape for background to a lady of fashion.

Diana cared little for gorgeous raiment, or for the rich dishes, the wines, the plays and shows, the castles and pictures—about as little as the most insipid fine lady going; yet, take these away, and *what was left?* Life was a jail—a prison-yard; it was indeed consigning this little heroine to the spin-house—cutting off her pretty hair, and putting her into the rough regulation dress of the establishment. How would she endure it? What was to become of her? She could not struggle or fight—she did not know how. She could not earn her bread. She had no friends—no one to call to for help. But though she sat there long with this dismal panorama spreading out before her, she was determined "to die first" rather than change about Robert Bligh. "I shall bear that punishment," she thought, "and deserve it also."





## CHAPTER XVI.

### MOTHER AND SON.

**N**O less heavy was the blow that had fallen on Robert Bligh. He walked away listlessly—his mind now, for the first time, far away from the dreams of ambition which had so recently filled it. Calm and disciplined as was his nature, this rejection had come on him with a sort of surprise-like blow, as it were. He had never expected it, and something seemed to tell him there would be no recall of those words. As he wandered round rather listlessly, he heard the *gamins*, with placards pinned on to their chests, crying the *Regent Street Chronicle*; and in the orange-coloured notices, fixed down to the pavement with stones, he read the announcement—"Verdict in the great Gay Case!" He bought a copy, and read,

### "SECOND EDITION.

"Our correspondent at Bentham telegraphs that Mr. Justice Cosherer charged the jury in this case strongly for the plaintiff. He, in fact, hinted to them that there was little for them to do but to find for the plaintiff. He commented on the curious fact of their principal witness, Mrs. Bligh, not being submitted to a searching cross-examination, for it was extraordinary how she came to

find herself in such an attitude. However the defendant's counsel had not chosen to avail themselves of this right ; why, it was not for him to say.

"Here counsel interposed, and said they were acting under instructions.

"His lordship continued to say that had been his opinion all through, and that the case had not lost anything in the able hands of the learned counsel ; still it was a mystery to him.

"The jury then retired, and after an absence of a quarter of an hour returned into court with a verdict for the plaintiff."

Bligh read this as he walked along. His eyes settled on the passage about his mother's examination. It was a mystery to him. What could they mean ? he thought, for he knew Mr. Page was tolerably unscrupulous, and would not let the case suffer. He got home to his own rooms, mechanically turned over some newspapers that had come in, lit his lamp, and through sheer force of habit, set to his dull evening's work.

Just as he had unfolded and smoothed out the first stiff page of a brief, looking up wearily, he became conscious of a tall figure standing before him—grim, pale, weird-like. He started and half rose ; then said, sadly,—

"Oh, mother !"

She said as slowly, and as sadly, "Well, Robert, the work is done. What I told you has been accomplished."

"But what a work !" he said rising and advancing to her. "What a wicked, cruel work ! How can you lay it to your conscience to have thus ruined an innocent trusting girl ? God forgive you, mother !"

"That is not between you and me, Robert," she said ; "your wish or prayer will not affect the matter. What I said I would do, I have done. Confess that you doubted it. My arm was strong enough to overtake her. I said she would rue the day that she trifled with me and mine, and she has rued it."

"She never trifled with you or yours," said he, warmly ; "never. If she had it was no excuse for such cruelty.

What crime had she done? What was her sin? Don't ask me to approve, or to forgive—"

"What!" she said, with infinite scorn; "has your head been so overset with these little successes—these empty, worldly honours? I see. Or have you so little spirit—the same old tame endurance which will let you *still* put up with any treatment from *her*? Or be a shuttlecock—wait patiently on her whims and humours. Or, perhaps you are still tamed—still hankering after her. I dare say, if you were to try now, you would have a fair chance. To a beggar like her, you and your property might now be an object."

Robert answered again, warmly. "This animosity is terrible. But you are right."

She started.

"Yes, I have just come from that unhappy victim, and tried to make her the only reparation for the wrong our family has done her. It was you, mother, who made this a sacred duty." She started back with a sort of horror; her face seemed to work in a convulsion; her long arm and hand beat off, as it were, something from her face.

"You did this; you dared to do—to undo what I have done! What! you driving me into what I would not wish to do. Take care, Robert Bligh! if I have sacrificed so much for this aim—I shall not stop there! And you have dared to do this?"

"Yes; but you know with what result? She has refused."

"Refused! All some trick, some coquettishness."

"No; finally, and for ever. She is gone away, and I shall see her no more. And do you know what I discover now, after all this elaborate vengeance? that I was right, mother—right in what I said long ago. That if *we had only waited*—waited patiently—she would have agreed to accept me. Yes, mother, this is the end of your pulling down and plotting—you have destroyed us both."

"No, no!" she said, passionately; "I do not believe it. This is some more of her arts."

"It is true, true before heaven; she has told me so



solemnly, and I believe her. Yes, she has told me, that she liked, even loved me, all through, but that she thought I did not care for her. And that, as I stand here, I believe to be the truth. Had you waited a little longer, all might have been well; but it is finished and finished for ever. One of these days she will change, I trust; I shall live in the hope of marrying her yet, stripped of everything, as she is; but that is not the ambitious ending to which you looked. But that, I find, is far off. Oh, mother, mother! why have you done this? Is this the end of all your planning—wretchedness for *me*, for her, and for yourself?"

Who would suppose that this was the old, unsympathetic Bligh we have been following through the course of this narrative; the man, as he may have reasonably been set down, so phlegmatic, so indifferent? There was colour in his cheeks, there was a trembling fervour in his voice, an agitation in his manner and gesture, everything that might have belonged to the warmest and most passionate of men.

Mrs. Bligh stood silent, gazing at him with wonder, overpowered, scarcely knowing him for her own son. As his cogent reasoning had so often convinced judges, so it seemed now to have the same force with her. She knew not what to say. She was overwhelmed. The lines of her cold hard face quivered as this castle came tumbling down in ruins about her. But hers was not a sort of nature to own that she had done wrong, or that could make atonement. She could not bow or bend, though she could break and suffer. As she stood there, before the lamp, she would have seemed to any other than her son a sort of baffled fury; and, when he looked up again, there was a blank void where she stood, and with a cry he rose up to follow her.

It was long before he could settle himself to his papers again. His mind was straying back to the great event of that day. Yet they were not over as yet; the drama of the day was not concluded. Before another hour had passed, a letter was brought in to him, directed in a little

"pinched" foreign hand, like the edge of a fine saw. It was very neatly and closely written, and he read it carefully through, smiling thoughtfully to himself as he closed it up. Of this letter the following is a copy :—

"DEAR MR. BLIGH,—You will, of course, have heard the great news of our success, and that I am now rich beyond all my hopes. I cannot bring myself to believe it, but they tell me it is no dream, and that there is no danger of my losing again what has been given to me in so wonderful a way ; and yet, as I have often told you, I am not in such excessive spirits, nor am I overwhelmed with happiness. I know I ought to be glad, as they tell me—yet my eyes look fondly back to our charming garden, my Amiens, and our dear French skies, and those good people who were so kind to me. These great streets, and gloomy walls, and crowds of houses, and greater crowds still of strange faces, chill me and make me miserable. Above all, Madame Saxe, who is my relation—of *her* I have a dread ; I know not why, for she tries to be kind to me in her way. Now, of course, with these changes and responsibilities, I know not what will become of me. In this world, somehow, I feel very much alone, and strange, as it were. But what is worst of all—shall I own it?—I have misgivings, a weight hangs over me, and something whispers me that all this may be some juggling, and that at the end of some bright day, I may have to give up all again. Who can tell?

"How shall I come to what I wish to say ! How shall I tell it to *you*—how shall I find words ! You well remember that day when we first met on board the packet, when I was very low-spirited and wretched. Then I saw a face, whose calm, quiet air arrested me at once. It seemed to me to be one of a friend, and full of a gentle sympathy. From that moment something was whispering to me, 'These are not all strangers.' And I was right. For you came so generously, so friendly, to my aid, and saved me. I knew you would. I had a presentiment that you would. And from that moment, there seemed to be some relation between us. Your kindness, your

reassuring goodnature, which always seemed to say to me that I had one friend at least in this dismal country, and I was not wholly a stranger, and wholly cast out from sympathy. Since then, through all these hopes and fears, I have thought of that one face ever since. In my lonely room it has been before me always.

"May I come to you to-morrow early, or will you come to me? Say which you prefer. I have something to tell you—to offer to you. You can guess, if you care to guess."

Robert Bligh laid down this strange letter—not without some impatience—"What folly, what absurdity." Yet he was not put out of his course in the least. It was no more than if some curious "bit" had turned up in the middle of a brief sent to him. He read it over again, thoughtfully. Then, after some reflections, he began to write a letter.

"You quite overrate the slight services I have rendered to you. They were such as any English gentleman would have done. So, if you could do me a favour, you will not mention small trifles again.

"As for your suit, I am afraid it is not for me to congratulate you. As you will know, your success must necessarily have brought proportionate misery into another house, and all the happiness it has brought to you it has taken from another. That, however, is not your fault, and it only belongs to an action at law. She will bear her trouble with fortitude, and the bitterness is now almost past. The whole has been so sudden that I can hardly believe it, and I almost begin to believe what you yourself have hinted, that there must be something underneath all this, and out of the usual course.

"I do not see, therefore, why I should see you again, as I say I could not bring congratulations. You will now have plenty crowding to do that. I shall have to be busy comforting the fallen, who have need of it. Besides, my sympathies have been all through with *that* side. What you can have to say to me, I do not pretend to guess. So I thank you most heartily for your generous

acknowledgment of very trifling services, and your kind sympathy for myself, who at this moment want a great deal of it—all, in fact, that I can get. And believe me I shall always feel deeply grateful for the interest you have had in me, and will be glad if you will let me show it at any time."

Robert Bligh sent this letter away at once. He was not quite a stoic, it will be seen, and did not write with the philosophic severity which men of his character might be supposed to assume. He really felt grateful to this most foolish French girl, and could not be ungracious. After that, he dismissed it from his mind as he would a case, and went to bed. But he did not sleep much on that night.





## CHAPTER XVII.

### A NEW PROPOSAL.

**I**N the morning papers the name of Gay figured a good deal. One or two had leaders; and the *Semaphore* gave one of its characteristic commentaries—a “mingle-mangle” of classic quotations, and fine “word painting.”

“*Expende Hannibalem*,” it began; “or, rather, *expende* the career of the fashionable young lady of our period, whose day and night is one delicious flutter, and whose golden pinions bear her from ball to ball—from ride to flower-show. She does not sow, of course; neither does she spin, save when encircled by the nervous arm of some “svelte” warrior. Who shall blame her, though whether of such should be the kingdom of Heaven, we leave to diviners to inquire. Yet it seems too heavy a judgment—quite too sore a penalty for the young and beautiful to be cast down, pauperised, stripped of all in a breath, and reduced to a privation which to *her* must be severer than the common privations of ordinary poverty. This moral is illustrated in the surprising romance of the Gay Court suit, and which shows us for the thousandth and first time that truth is stranger than fiction.”

This public painting of a moral was not the least serious trial for poor Diana. Indeed she had not seen the article in the *Semaphore*, though there were Samaritans enough

of her acquaintance willing enough to direct her attention to it in some artful way. At the clubs, on the morning of which she has been one of the glories, it was talked of eagerly. The *fade* young ladies, her contemporaries, simpered over it, and said, "It was dreadful, wasn't it? And *so she had no right to the place after all!*" As though these young patrician dames had been despoiled, under false pretences, of their smiles and nods, and insipid few sentences of greeting, which indeed was all that Diana was in their debt. Many a young spark cantering along by the side of his *dame* made himself more acceptable, as he thought, or perhaps less *ennugante*, by some details fresh from the club, and overlaid too with his own private varnish. Wally Pepys even—her old *soi-disant* admirer, "her slave"—as the battered, heartless old campaigner used to call himself—now sneered and jeered, and told his little stories about that poor fallen girl. Her poverty, in his eyes, was the most awkward, inconvenient, and contemptible thing in the world; and he had never met a poor person who was either handsome or refined, or worth talking to, which was his standard of virtue, although they might have been amiable, virtuous, sweet, and gentle—things which, when combined with that deficiency, were of no concern to him. "A very free and easy young piece of goods," he said, "and took wonderful airs when we come to think of it. I suppose she will be coming to us all round to recommend her as a governess or a matron to some place, or will have the old story of the private committee, and be pestered for our names. 'A most sad case, my dear sir. We really must do something, or they'll starve.' I know the style of thing."

"Well, hang it," said a young man, warmly, "they had you often enough at their house. They were worth a dinner now and then."

Some of the dowagers and matrons were secretly pleased. In this great battle of their life, their fashionable prayers and fastings, and working out this salvation for themselves, the best and most charitable could only

look on this struggle as one where there were so many prizes, fixed in number, so that it was eminently desirable that competitors should be diminished. One or two were deeply sorry.

Young Patmore was plunged into the sorest gloom and depression. He bewailed his fate and her condition. He had behaved like a brute. But what could a fellow do—a fellow situated as he was? He went to walk in lonely places, and solaced himself planning schemes for her deliverance. He even settled the amount—he thought a thousand pounds—which could be offered “delicately, you know.” But after much debating, like most of Viscount Patmore’s schemes, it came to nothing; and he thought it would be better to leave it as it was.

Bligh, for whom a load of business was always waiting, had to keep appointments, and “see people” on business. As he was hurrying along, after a hasty breakfast, he met Mr. Bowman.

“I was just going to you,” said he; “and am so glad I met you. I wanted to talk to you about our poor little Diana. My God Almighty! was there ever such a business? What will they think of it down there? Why, you might as well have thought of pulling down the Bank of England as of laying a finger on Gay Court. I thought it would have gone on to the day of judgment.”

Mr. Bowman was a true squire, as he often boasted, and firmly believed that, though squires and old families might sicken and even die, that old places were above the incidents of change.

“My poor little girl!” he went on, with deep feeling. “I love her like my own child, and since Maggie’s troubles, she has been like an angel. The worst is, there is no doing anything with her. She has taken up a stiff, self-sacrificing tone, and talks of going away, and living and dying abroad by herself. Now, my dear friend, you must talk to her, for you are a rock of sense, and know how to speak, and all that, which I don’t.”

“I have tried, indeed,” said Bligh, “but without the least success,”

Mr. Bowman, now dwelling piteously on the case, at last brought him away to their hotel, begging of him to say something and use his influence with "the poor girl." Bligh scorned to let any conventional delicacy stand in the way.

He found Diana just a little changed—very pale, and with a light and fire in her eye which seemed to have come of long watching. There was a firmness and resolve in her air and manner which seemed to speak of some suffering or horrid suspense. She told Bligh that she knew all now, that she had heard from her lawyer, and that she had not spirit enough to stay here and face the mortifications of her new position.

"I will go," said poor Diana, "to Belgium, where it is, I think, they have those ladies who live together, and try to do good out of the world."

"Yes," said Mr. Bowman; "that's it—a Beguine—you know, my dear child, it's absurd, and couldn't be."

"I am determined on going, Mr. Bowman, and shall go next week. All I ask is to get away from this place."

"I know not what to say," said Bligh, deeply commiserating her. "You will not be persuaded by me."

Now entered Mr. Page, with papers—come to talk business. He was glad to see Bligh, and he began eagerly to talk over the case. Mr. Bowman went away. But Diana grew not a little restless, and seemed eager to change the subject of their talk from that. Mr. Page spoke dismally. "Most unfortunate business," he said; "but we were fighting with one hand tied behind us. If we could have cross-examined that witness—though she was your relation, Mr. Bligh—"

"Allowed to cross examine!" repeated Bligh, in astonishment — and seizing the point of the allusion — "why, was that the reason, O Diana!"

"No, indeed," she said, "that is — but how could I? No, that had nothing to do with it,"

"But it had," said Mr. Page, impatiently; "the judge said so. However, it is all at an end now."



This disclosure quite confounded Bligh—such a sacrifice for him—from this poor generous girl.

“I don’t quite give the thing up yet. See, Mr. Bligh ; persuade her.”

“Give me those papers I mentioned to you. I am convinced the name Potter was there. Oh, that should have been looked to ! I was busy and hurried, and had not time.”

Diana answered indifferently that it was no matter. But Robert Bligh, growing surprisingly excited for one of his temperament, pressed the matter so eagerly and warmly that he at last wrung a reluctant consent from her that she would let him take the papers away, and allow him to look over them.

Then followed the busy day—the Court, the House, the committee-room—the weariness, mingled with an excitement which alleviated so much of the weariness. He hurried home, snatched a morsel of dinner ; he then set to work at his hodman’s labour. He sat on, using his legal shovel rapidly and with energy ; throwing up the mould about him, and getting through his work with great energy ; and was about to rise to hurry down to the House, when word was brought to him that a lady wished to see him. The next moment Miss Eugenie was before him.

“I have come to you,” she said, “after your letter—your cold letter. At least, so far as I can understand it.”

Robert Bligh, a little embarrassed, and seeing perhaps what was before him, was not “scarred” into an impatience, nor did he forget his invariable gentleness and gentlemanliness.

“Perhaps I did not understand,” he said, “or assumed more than was meant.”

“Yes, you did,” she answered sadly, “and I can see that you never cared for me—ever so little even—and that *now* you *despise* me.”

“You must not think of such a thing,” said Bligh, kindly. “I both admire you and feel grateful for the great honour you have done me, and of which I am most undeserving—”

"I know—I know all that," said she, with a little impatience. "I understand these compliments. And you can be so cruel—even this mortification you might have spared me."

"Would to Heaven I could," said he, "or rather, there is no mortification in the world. You have offered something which any man would accept, and I among the number—that is, could I do so. But now, will you bear with me for a few moments while I speak to you as a friend that likes, and has a sincere interest in you? Now, you will remember at the very outset, I told you you could not reckon on me to take up your side of this business, and that such influence and sympathy as I possessed must be with your opponent. She deserves infinitely more, you will confess, now that she has been defeated and has lost all."

"Ah, yes; and your heart is with her—*she* loves you, and had she prevailed, would have done what I did."

Bligh shook his head and smiled.

"No, no; far from it. She is away—out in the world—leaving us for ever. No; I fear she does not care for me."

She fixed a penetrating look on him.

"Answer me, then, this one question. Promise me, only one, and I shall never trouble you again—never."

Bligh had the true barristerial instinct, and guessing what this was, did not answer for a moment.

"Ah, you refuse me everything," she said bitterly.

"Tell me, have you offered yourself to her? I have have no right to ask, I know—"

"Well," said he, "it is better to tell the truth—I have. But from my childhood I have always looked to her, since I was a mere schoolboy; for her have I worked all my life—to her have I looked—for her has been my success—and for her, should she persist in this fatal resolution, shall be my fall, I fear. For I can take no more interest in the successes or honours of this life. There is the whole truth."

Who could suppose that this was the old Robert Bligh, supposed to be so cold and self-interested?

"Can you be surprised, then," he went on, "if even, after what has passed, I find myself wishing her success, and working for her interest? Forgive me if I tell you that this victory of yours seems to me too sudden — too abrupt, to be substantial. I have a presentiment that something yet will come to light — and even this night I am going to devote to some new investigation of the matter, which I must wish may bring a change. It is only fair and candid to tell you all this, though I know it seems ungracious on my side."

She remained silent for a few moments.

"They told me all this," she said, "and I ought to have guessed it. Now I understand at last."

There was another tap at the door, and his servant came and whispered to Bligh: "A lady, sir."

She caught the words.

"A lady!" she repeated, eagerly.

"Who?" said Bligh.

"She has brought a box of papers, and is coming upstairs."

"It is what I was speaking of," said Bligh; "this is the business. I must give myself to-night—"

"And it is she?" said Eugenie.

"Yes," said Bligh, hurriedly; "the one, recollect, whom you have vanquished, despoiled."

It was Diana who now entered, and started as she saw the other. She remembered her at once. She knew not what to do, and stood on the threshold, hesitating — in her old fluttering way — not knowing whether to go back or come forward. It might seem a situation that Bligh should have prevented at all hazards, and could have done; but he had a faint notion that something might come of this meeting after — at least, nothing worse for Diana could happen than what had occurred.

Eugenie, looking long and earnestly at Diana from head to foot, said at last—

"At ! so we meet. So you are Diana Gay? I am sorry for you, but they tell me it is only my right."

"If it be so," said Diana, gently, "I do not grudge it to you ; and it is hard that you have been kept from your inheritance so long."

"You can be generous," said the other, looking at her steadily. "But who knows? He says it is not over yet ; and I may still have to make the same speech to you. He tells me plainly, his wishes and his work, and his sympathy cannot be with me. They belong to you, *whom he loves*. Yes, he told me so—whom he has loved and for whom he has lived—for whom he has won all these honours since he was a child. Why do you not like *him* ?"

"Everything has ended for me in *this* life, and I go to begin another. I have brought the papers," she said to Bligh. "Don't be alarmed," she added, turning to Eugenie ; "they will do *you* no mischief. That I am confident of. Good-bye. Don't think I feel the least anger to you. You have only obtained what is your right.—It is not for me to stand in the way."

The other took her hand, clasped it warmly—and, with a sudden impulse, pressed a kiss upon it. Then, with an impulse as sudden, abruptly cast it from her, and stood haughtily looking at Diana from head to foot.

"And I too stand upon my rights. I ask no compliment from any one. What has been given to me, I have won fairly and by the laws of the land."

She then turned and slowly left the room. Diana now, as it seemed to Bligh, grown strangely grave and serious, said hurriedly, "I have brought you these, not that I believe there can be anything found, but lest you should think I should not wish to do what you ask me to do. And now, dear Robert, I must go. A million of thanks for all your goodness and devotion, which I have been quite unworthy of, and which I ought to have acknowledged long, long ago ; but I was a child then, up to a few weeks ago."

"But why do you speak in this way, Diana? I shall see you again, often; I have so much to say to you."

"Because I may go at any time, the sooner the better. I am longing to get away from this scene. For now, Robert, I begin to find the mortification very bitter—the people I meet, and their looks—"

"But what *is* to become of you?" said Robert, actually passionately; "you cannot go out in this world by yourself; you must not, you will suffer and perish. Oh, Diana, think a moment of what I said. Consider it again; you are leaving me to misery—though *that* I do not care about—but also a misery and wretchedness that is all concerned for you. You may refuse again as plainly as you like, but I do conjure you, think again, reflect, have pity on yourself and on me. Surely there is no necessity for this miserable self-sacrifice; in your innocent life, there is nothing to atone. Stay, Diana, stay with me and share my prosperity and success, such as it is."

Diana listened with wonder to this new strain. She seemed irresolute, and he saw the old smile of delight on her face; but she had recalled her old resolutions, wished him good-night hurriedly, and had joined her maid who was waiting in the hall.

As Bligh turned back abstractedly into his study, a letter was brought in to him. It was from the House, and from the "whipper-in" of their party—to use the familiar designation drawn from the country field, and adopted of its own motion by that august body. It was labelled "most pressing and immediate," and he had to jump into a cab and fly express down to the House, where he remained two dull hours.

The division was over by midnight, and he got away at last.

In half an hour his lamp was drawn close, his great tin box open beside him, and he was thoughtfully and earnestly looking through letter after letter. Many of the bundles were quite new to him—accounts, dockets, agri-

cultural letters, bills even—for the Gay family seemed to have been scrupulous in preserving every paper. It was a long and tedious search, and more than an hour passed over before he came on the “lode” which he had discovered when down at Gay Court. So the time went. Just as the clock struck one, he started up with a cry, and his servant, who slept below, heard a *sound* as of a trampling and excited pushing back of a chair, and heartily “cussed” the interrupter of his slumbers.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### DIANA ON THE WORLD.

**W**ITH the morning—and bright and hopeful as the morning itself—Robert Bligh was at the door of Starridge's fashionable private hotel. Its pure plate-glass, speckless, seemed each like an entrance to dark and unfathomable caves of fashionable life. There was a general glistening air, and the genteelest of private gentlemen received Bligh's application in the hall, with a soft deprecation as who should say, "Do speak low, please ; for you can't imagine the number of titled persons there are upstairs."

"Miss Gay, sir? and Lady Margaret, sir? and Mr. Bowman, sir? Yes, sir. Oh yes, sir. So sorry : they all left this morning."

"All gone!" repeated Bligh, "and Miss Gay! and where—"

"Yes, sir. Oh she went to the Cawntnent by the Horsetend boat—"

"Gone to the Continent?" Bligh was aghast. "But you have her address?" he said.

The private gentleman shook his head sadly, and smiled sweetly. Bligh then hurried away to her solicitor, and found Mr. Page in. That gentleman was in his usual airy spirits. He said, "Mr. Bligh, a really melancholy business. Yes, she's gone, wished to go privately and

without taking leave, and all that. She was here last evening, and insisted on the costs and charges being made out, roughly of course, and paid everything."

The scene now changes to the dull Belgian line of railway, on which the trains amble along, and come jogging into monotonous stations where there are no platforms, but where honest rustics with baskets, and traders, come running from the roadside in a vast hurry, and cluster at the steps of the carriages as though they were about to crowd into an omnibus, and there would not be room. These vehicles come so comfortably and depart so quietly, as though drawn by safe and steady old horses.

Beyond the station rise strong, tall houses, of a yellow or pinkish complexion—sallow and unhealthy looking—with "Estaminet de Station," or "Hôtel du Chemin-de-Fer" in faint letters, whose colours have become smeared and have run, from the trickling of the rain. These pale-complexioned houses straggle off, we know, to a town, and most likely that town is either Ghent or Bruges.

On that threshold the feeling is sure to be one of depression, even for the practised traveller; but for the timid stranger, to whom a foreign country is new—women, girls who are friendless, and are cut off from their own friends, and are cast adrift—that first *début* in loneliness, under such conditions, is the most dismal thing in the whole, and wide, world.

In a slumbering Bruges street, where the houses were of the prevailing dark yellow, lived an elderly, single English lady, Miss Robinson, who had been there for many years, and who let lodgings to the English, and to the English only. She, herself, with all her long residence—and she was a tall, stiff, wiry, prim woman, with a considerable power of mind—declined to receive natives on any terms, having a true contempt for all foreigners, which grew with every fresh year's residence. She kept herself apart, always talked of England, compared every article—needles particularly—with imaginary English



standards of old years. This lady, some twenty years before, had been a governess to some relation of Lady Margaret Bowman's, had lost her "savings" in some decent and very "pious" country bank, who almost made it a favour to take deposits, and had been driven over to Bruges.

To her one evening arrived a very timid young girl, seated in the railway omnibus with her maid, whom she had been expecting. She received them very austere, saying she was always happy to do anything for Lady Margaret, or for Lady Margaret's family, making a concession, as it were, of thus letting her apartments. She said she expected to find Miss Gay—for it was that young lady—much older, and hinted at a possible want of steadiness.

She showed Diana into the apartments, clean, bright, shining, without a speck, garnished with some purely English ornaments, a fire screen, a small vase of English china, an English table-cloth, rather faded, and which had formerly adorned rooms let for lodgings in the mother country.

Miss Robinson had not the whole house, but other guests lived in it, while a bonnet maker lived in the shop below.

Diana's window "gave" on the street, and she saw from the white row of houses opposite, with their yellow "jealousies" all blank, many stories high, the muslin blinds drawn close; and a great tall closed *orte-cochère*, with a huge oaken double door.

Very few passed down this quiet thoroughfare, and at a butcher's shop, where there were two or three tiny morsels of meat within glazed windows, the owner sat at the door alone and read his newspaper all day long. There she would be able finally to shut out that dreadful night of England, and the passing friends and acquaintances, the very sight of whom was a jar. As she passed in her cab through London, a glass went to the eye of a gentleman riding, who started and thought how reduced she

seemed to have grown. "Going about in a cab," he told his friends, "I declare, yes." She had at last got free, at last got away, severed every tie, was at last engulfed in the great waters of obscurity ; and here she was now, on the first evening, sitting in her room trying to read, sitting at the window as dismal and miserable as girl's heart ever was in this world.

What was the course she was looking to? what had she planned? Perhaps she had a faint hope that she might soon wither away, and fade out altogether in the struggle. She thought that might be the happier issue after all. But in the meantime she had determined to supplement her little pittance by the aid of her own honest labour.

The poor child had, *of course*, determined to seize on that plank that always comes drifting by, in family shipwreck. No matter how ignorant, how unsuited ; the reduced lady always thinks herself equal to teaching children or girls, brings herself to it with reluctance and agony, and thinks that mere consent sufficient to ensure success.

Yes, Diana Gay, the former heiress of Gay Court—the light and airy butterfly of fashion—whose life seemed to lookers-on, as indeed it did to herself, like the gorgeous existence of the Queen of Crystal Delights in a pantomime to children in the boxes, had actually brought her young mind to the stern resolve of going out as a GOVERNESS ! Yes, in this foreign city she would teach English to the French children, such little music as she knew, drawing also she thought—taking stock of her not very powerful accomplishments. A wild dream, that poor pretty child—that stood herself in need of a governess—going round to the houses to give lessons !

Yes, this poor child had come to begin life at Bruges—a kind of penal servitude, indeed. She had often heard of families being suddenly reduced, and having asked about them long after, had been told, with a shaking of the head, "Oh, they are gone, you know, to live at Bruges." Hence it seemed to her that residence there

should follow almost as a matter of course, and that the new life she had fixed upon must begin at that settlement. Her reformation, she thought, could not be worked out properly unless it commenced at this official seat. To it her little heart tended; she longed to get there. Yet she little fancied, like a pretty maid servant applying to a severe matron, with "gentlemen in the family," how austere would her proposals be repulsed. Yet she was longing, eager to begin, dying for the occupation which would enable her to kill the past.

Her first day, then another, dragged by. A faithful maid—a little girl from Gay Court, who had refused to desert her like the rest of the world, had gone with her. This was her only support in her struggle, for struggle it was to be, and her only arms. She wept a great deal. Her pale, delicate cheek was growing flushed and fevered. With her austere landlady she did not find much comfort. She was Scotch—grimly Calvinistic, yet not without a good heart, over which, however, had grown a thick, hard shell of pride and spirituality—a sort of moral ossification, in fact, which hindered its proper motion. When this state of things had gone on for some time, she therefore came and gave Diana some sound advice, bidding her "lean upon the Lord,"—consolation which only frightened instead of encouraging the poor girl.

A couple of days, and she went out dreamily and hopelessly. As she was beginning this new shape-of life, she might go through all due forms. Outside or inside was equally indifferent to her. Her faithful maid was with her—that Polly from sweet Gay Court. Polly had warmly described some of the wonders of the old city, its amazing churches and town halls, whose magnificence, whose sacred and crusted Gothic elaboration had appealed mistily even to her rustic heart. She saw what there was at least of vast labour and marvellous stone cuttings, and the reverent air of age always impressive. The old belfry had struck her most. "It beat," she said, "the Tower of London." She took her mistress to see these various

shows, who surveyed them listlessly. For those under a trouble—the recent death of one much loved, or of heavy anxiety—beauty loses all its charm. These things were so many masses of hewn stone. As they passed away from the belfry, they came near seats that were under some shady trees, and where a few people were sitting. Polly, whose eyes were ranging about, seeing something to admire in every direction, gave a start, and called out, “Oh, miss! if that be not—, no! but it can’t—or else he be very altered.”

Diana looked and saw an elderly gentleman, much bent, and leaning on a stick, and looking about listlessly. She remembered Mr. Lugard, the father, at once, and ran forward. The sight of a familiar face in that desert was like warm sunshine. As she came up, her small hand out, her voice faltered with excitement, and uttered the words, “Oh, oh, Mr. Lugard!”

Dark lustre eyes were turned dully towards her, with a curious look. It was only after a sort of start he seemed to recollect, and uttered, with a little difficulty, “Oh, Diana, Miss Gay! So you are here, in this place! What on earth—”

“Oh, I am so glad to see some one,” said poor Diana, “some one that I know, in this lonely place.”

“An infernal hole, Miss Gay, but we must put up with it. My health has been very bad, and I have suffered a great deal this last winter. They have absolutely nothing here, no attraction, no decent people—a few broken-down English. Ah, my dear child, to one who has lived in London, and in a fine country, with the hunting, and the good old stock, it is an awful, awful change.”

Diana on another occasion would have said, “But why come here?” Something, however, whispered her the reason. Indeed she was indifferent and incurious enough. Something of the old colour was coming back to her cheek. “Mrs. Lugard, you know, is here. I believe you never met her yet. She is an invalid, like myself. We

are not, in fact, as rich as we used to be." Then Diana remembered having heard from Richard Lugard that "the rich widow" his father had married had been, in the story of the clubs, "a take-in." He had merely married a long schedule of debts.

"But it was not *that*," he continued, answering what he justly fancied was in Diana's thoughts. "Do you know what has driven me here, to this infernal hole? That fellow, my son. Nothing else, under God! The black-guard has ruined me—went and married a creature whose father has become bankrupt. That was his own concern. But what right had he to drag me in, putting my name on his bills? I ought to have let the matter be exposed before a police court, only I knew those wretched people wouldn't take the trouble to distinguish between my name and his. It was Lugard—that was enough. God help me! To think of my coming to a wretched hole through an infernal scoundrel who had neither wit nor sense nor brains—a fool whom I got into Parliamenr, and who couldn't keep in—an ass who has made a botch of everything in life! It sickens me even to think of it, and to think of myself being kept in prison—in a hole not fit for an English gentleman to live in. When I think of the old days at Gay Court—I was thinking of them as you came up then, and of that morning when we gave *him* the picture, and I made him the speech—"

There was a pause, when suddenly he turned to her. "You, I suppose, are travelling—going on in state to Hamburgh, or Paris, or some of those places. 'Miss Gay and suite' in *Galignani*. And poor old Margaret—she was hit hard, poor woman! How is Gay Court? Ah, Miss Diana! you are well off; but mind whom you marry. I wished you to have that fellow, but it is the best for you as you are."

"Oh," said Diana, "then you have not heard. The case went against me, and I have lost all—"

"*What!*" said he. "Oh, there was to be a trial—I remember now. And do you mean to say that you have lost? What! Gay Court gone?"

Diana's face was turned to the ground, and she did not answer.

"My goodness! what are we coming to? Turned out of Gay Court! And what are you doing here? Have you come to live here?"

"I am obliged to, Mr. Lugard," she said. "I have but little left—and there is no disgrace, if I could only see the way, in trying to earn one's bread."

"*Earn one's bread!*" he said, rising with difficulty, and leaning on his stick. "Earn one's bread! What do you mean—you—"

There was so much conviction in this tone—so much contempt, also, as the truth seemed to dawn upon him—that Diana felt quite timorous and humiliated. But she answered steadily,—

"There is no discredit in honest labour, and I hope to find some way."

"I suppose as a governess. God help us all! Then I conjure you, reflect a moment. Think of an old family like yours, and don't bring it into discredit. I could do nothing for you, I tell you plainly; I can't go begging and interceding. Why really, only yesterday evening I was telling the consul here about Gay Court, and how the thing was kept up; and now I must tell him the owner wants to be a governess! It's too absurd."

"I am not asking you for anything," said Diana, with dignity. "God forbid I should have occasion."

"Oh, I don't mean that," he said, "but I tell you plainly, this place won't suit you. There is no money for teaching, and no one wants to be taught; so I would change the scene if I were you."

This heartlessness gave Diana a very chill in her heart, and she withdrew without a word, and without hearing Mr. Lugard's muttered complaint "that they were now to be overrun with paupers, it seemed."



## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE FÊTE DAY.



ABOUT this time there was to be high festival held in Bruges, on the occasion of the opening of some great institution by the King—the late excellent Leopold—who was to come from Brussels, and in whose honour there were to be *fêtes*, and a competition of the *Concordia*, and other singing societies, illuminations, and other shapes of rejoicing. The whole town was astir—workmen were busy; and Diana's own Polly had caught a little of the excitement. She had an admirer already in the person of the *traiteur* from whom she got their slender provisions, and she eagerly brought in word of the great preparations that were being made. She was not more than seventeen or eighteen. There was an English "gentleman's gentleman" at the Hotel, who had seen her, who told her that "the affair would be very creditable on the 'ole," and announced that he himself meant to participate therein. He mentioned a little "feat" in some gardens, where there was to be dancing and feasting, as especially worthy of approval.

This in no way concerned Diana, who was listlessly and morbidly thinking of that one aim—how she was to work, and thus begin to forget the past. This inaction would be but the very threshold of despair.

The morning was now come; it was only the fourth

day since her arrival. It was a Sunday, which gave a ready-made text to Miss Robinson to enlarge on the "sinful doings of those pious benighted 'Belgums,'" as she called them, "who had no care for their poor miserable souls!" This frightful depravity did not awaken Diana, who was utterly indifferent to all that was going on. For now the delighted Polly had flown down with news "that they were coming!" and the strains of bands, and the hum of voices in the streets, with the marching of feet, was still more significant warning. On it came—a brilliant procession, set off by the scarlet hanging from the windows, and the more effective, full, healthy faces of the honest Burgher women. First the riflemen, in jager hats and green plumes, their breasts hung over with medals, their banners carried within punts, so large and heavy were they; then the singing societies, their banners literally studded all over with medals, and looking almost like a coat of brilliant mail; then music, distant and coming near; then soldiers, and more banners, bishops, clergy, and the Burgomaster and his citizens. So they went by, in this state, on one of the loveliest and sunny days conceivable. And it made Diana—who was stopped at a street corner by the passing pageant—yet more dismal; for it seemed like one of the delicious old Gay Court hunting mornings.

They passed on to the institution, where they formed in a hollow square, and the King and all his court came and went through their programme—whatever this was—so thought Diana, indifferently enough.

As she came away listlessly, and gallant officers clattered by, she heard a voice of astonishment before her; and some one who had passed her hurriedly had looked back and stopped. "Good gracious, Miss Gay! *you* here?" It was Mr. Canning Bowman in a vast hurry, and full of importance.

"Why, what on earth," he added—then stopped. "I heard it all, you know—that is, my father wrote to me—so sorry, I am sure."



There was a restlessness in his manner, and his face was looking anxiously forward. Poor Diana was rejoiced to meet this friendly face, though under such mortifying circumstances. With her old confidential way, she drew close to him—the Bowmans were *such* friends always. “Yes,” said she, “there have been changes since we met. I will tell you why I am here, Mr. Canning.”

He was still looking out restlessly. “Fact is,” he said, “I came over here from Brussels for these *fetes*, to meet the Brenners. You remember Mdlle. Brenner. They are to be at the ball to-night, and I am going to meet them at their hotel. I am sure they will be sorry. I shall certainly come and see you at the first opportunity.” And very restless still, he shook her hand, and, without asking her address, hurried away. Surely mortifications were being crowded on this poor little head of Diana’s.

The day drew on. To her it was like a dream. Then there were prizes to be conferred—more medals to be hung on the banners ; and the day stole by very quickly.

The enthusiasm of the little maid Polly was extreme ; and in the evening she had news of a yet greater *fête*—illuminated grounds, a dance, and a serenade of His Majesty in the pretty gardens under the windows. In the same passive way Diana agreed to go ; and indeed she had already begun to shrink from the rather grim monotony of the austere lodgings to which she had bound herself.

It was a lovely cool evening, and the lights were twinkling in all directions. The air was soft and balmy. All the crowd was hurrying in one direction—to the illuminated gardens, on which the great rows of windows, where the feasting was going on, were blazing with a rich soft light. Thousands of faces were turned to these glorified windows. From below them was wafted the softest strains of music from the wonderful throats which were accompanying delicious voices with marvellous simulation of orchestral instruments. Close by were the trees ; and through the trees were twinkling lights ; and here was the

great platform where the town was dancing ; and round were the bowers, and the little tables where so many were feasting happily. So do foreign nations enjoy themselves with tolerable innocence.

The night thus passed on. By-and-by the upturned faces were gratified, and the gorgeous effulgence of the great bow window became of a sudden crowded with dark figures ; and Diana heard great guttural shouts of delight as the lieges saw their king. She stood under the dark trees, watching the bright figures glistening in fitful motion. Presently came up the English "gentleman's gentleman." Having found out Polly, and respectfully got on equal terms, he asked—for his "hinstink" told him that Diana was "redoosed"—for one short dance.

When Polly was gone, Diana looked on without moving, and had noticed a figure posting to and fro quickly, looking at this and that group, and passing on and coming back. After a long interval, it came by near her ; and something in the shape and outline seemed to be familiar to her. Suddenly his face came full into the light—a wild, questioning face. Diana knew it. At the same moment hers was revealed to him, and he had rushed to join her.

In this wilderness, the joy, the happiness of meeting one who felt for her, made Diana forget all that had passed between them ; and with a cry of delight, she flew to Richard Lugard.

He was in a sort of rapture. "My dear, dear Diana," he said, "I have found you at last. I could not stay longer. Some providence directed me to you. What are you doing in this place? Why have you come here? What is the meaning of all this? Sit down here and tell me."

But now Diana recalled her last interview, and she drew herself away.

"Oh, you should not have done this ; for I cannot listen to you now."

"But you must listen to me first, Diana," he went on, in growing excitement. "You know what has happened since you left. Had you only put confidence in me!"

"But what do you do here?" said Diana, now alarmed at his wild eye and excited manner. "Why should you have come here?"

"Because I could not stay—after *you*. Because I heard that you meant to work and labour for your bread—as they say. *You*! Those dear delicate fingers! Never, Diana! I could not endure that notion."

She was touched by his interest in spite of herself.

"Oh, Richard," she said, "I know you mean well; but—"

"But listen to me," he went on, "just for one moment. I implore you, for the sake of old days, when you were kind, and indeed were yourself. Look at the state you are in, Diana. Look at what is before you. The misery, the struggle, the certain ruin; for you cannot fight the battle. You have not strength, nor have you been accustomed to it, and will be overwhelmed. I have foreseen all this, Diana, and my heart bled for you; and to save you from such a fate I would ruin myself—before heaven I would!"

"Yes, I would," he went on, in growing excitement; "and here is the proof. When I thought you were leaving us, I sat down and wrote to you—what I felt, Diana, and what I wished to do. It was a desperate letter, and it had been better you had not seen it."

Diana, quite terrified by his manner, growing wilder every moment, looked round for escape; but his hand was on her arm.

"You must let me finish now," he said. "Yes, Diana; you must know all that I have been content to lose for you, and would lose again. Yes, she found it, and that evening went away to her family. I am glad of it; for it was a life of hell itself."

Diana could not say a word.

"I rushed to the agents; my commission is for sale or

sold, and I have come to you. We shall begin life again, Diana, as we ought to have begun it long ago. But it is not too late. I have given up all for you—you can give up a little for me—who have had only one thought during all my life, and that one, you! My carriage is in the courtyard at the hotel, ready—the horses put to—the world before us.”

At last she could speak.

“Oh, let me go! Some one save me!” she said, faintly. “Oh, this is the worst of all; and you can insult me this way again!”

“Insult you!” he said, setting her free in his wild astonishment. “I that have ruined myself for you!”

“Let me away; I shall die if you stay near me.”

“And *you* say this to me? Ah! if you could but have seen him. No; he dared not have come to you.”

“What!” cried Diana; “then he is here. Oh, where is he? Oh, tell me quick. Bring me to him; he is my only—my true friend.”

“*You* say this! Take care, Diana. If I thought for a moment that you cared for him—’Pon my life I begin to think you always did. But *that*, as I stand here, I could not, I dare not trust myself to see.”

“Do leave me,” said she, fluttering birdlike in his grasp. “Do go away.”

“No, Diana; I cannot give you up. I have sacrificed too much for you. Come!”

It seemed to her that she *must* go; and that she dare not disobey. Again she faltered,

“What is to become of me?”





## CHAPTER XX.

### THE RESCUE.

“**F**EAR nothing, Diana ; I am here to protect you. Take my arm. There.”

A strong calm voice said these words. Diana’s little hand was on that arm in a moment.

Lugard almost foamed at the mouth.

“I saw you at the packet, though you did try and hide and wrap yourself up. How dare you spy after me?”

Bligh did not answer him.

“Come away,” he said to her. “Fear nothing with me ; I shall take care of you. And you,” he said to Lugard, “do not dare to follow. I heard what you proposed ; and after that your presence would be contamination. Speak yourself, Diana ; it is necessary.”

“Oh, let me not see him ! Let us go, Robert.”

Lugard gave a sort of frantic cry, and, putting his hand to his breast, half drew out something. He checked himself. Then, with an effort at calmness, said, “Just two words, Robert Bligh, in private. Don’t be afraid.”

Bligh went to him without hesitation.

“For the present I pass all this by, as *she* is present. But you must swear to meet me in the morning. In this country these things can be managed.”

Bligh seemed to hesitate.

"It will be worse for you if you do not. I owe you much since that day at Wheeler's — how long ago now? By heaven; you shall pay here, and before twelve hours are over; or else there are ways in this country to—"

"I promise you," said Bligh, excitedly. "You may depend on me. It is time this should end."

"Oh, I am so glad, Robert," Diana whispered, "so glad you have come back. I should have died, I think, if this had gone on longer. I find I have no mind—no resolution, after all."

They were walking round the illuminated gardens. The dancing, the music, was going on.

"No," he said; "I was afraid that would never do. You are not called on to enter on such a life. I was thinking all these few days how you must have suffered."

"But I have deserved it all—I have indeed," said Diana. She felt that her tears were coming.

"But there was no need," he went on gently, "of such haste, was there? I wished to have time to look through those papers."

"No matter," said she. "Do not let us talk of the past. Oh, it is so delightful to me to meet a friendly face—"

"I did," he went on, in the same reflective tone, "find time to go through that case of papers. There was such a quantity of them to look through, and my eyes are not of the best; but I succeeded in finishing the task."

"Indeed you have always been kind to me. And how long are you going to stay? are you going on to travel?"

"But you do not ask me," he said, "was my trouble successful? did I find anything? You should have trusted me—believed in me. I did find some very important letters in that box—"

"I dare say," said she, absently.

"Letters which, if they had been produced at the trial, would have set the case in quite a different light."

"Well, it is over and done with," said she, "and for ever; and we shall not talk of it any more."

He stopped in front of her—looked into her face.

"No, my dear Diana ; it is *not* done with for ever. Thank God ! no. Providence has taken care that one so gentle, so charming, so good as you are should not suffer so cruel a punishment. Can you bear to listen to some surprisingly good news—"

"Oh, Robert !"

"That, having found these precious papers, they completely establish *your* case ? Can you bear to hear more, Diana ? That, thus armed, I sought those who have turned you out, and their advisers ; put them in possession of what I knew ; showed them our hands, as it were, and—"

"Oh, Robert ! Is all this a dream ? Am I to be a little happy again ?"

"Yes, Diana. What you were before. Just the same ; with something less, indeed ; but—"

"Oh, Robert ! Robert !" she exclaimed, in a perfect flutter, "there is no mistake ? for I could not bear another change—a fresh casting down—"

"No ! no ! It is fixed. I have their writing signed and sealed. I saw her. I saw her solicitors. I showed them that with these papers we could begin again, and with a perfect certainty of success. The young girl behaved nobly, and most generously. The woman with her was furious ; but the young girl persisted. They have indeed no case ; but in your name I ventured to propose a compromise, allowing her a small annuity, and which will indeed be a cheap release from further law and vexation."

Diana could only utter, "Oh, Robert ! Oh, Robert ! This must be all a dream. After all this wretchedness and desolation of these few days, I was ready to have sunk down and died."

"That is all at an end now. Perhaps you will enjoy these blessings now the more on account of that suffering."

So the hours passed on. They heard the sweet music

at a distance, and saw the lights glittering. It seemed to her the most delicious music — the lights like those of fairyland — the faces the kindest and sweetest of the world. Such is the halo delightful news and sudden happiness cast round everything. Years after she looked back to that night as the happiest in her life.

They walked about still talking.

"You must come back at once," he said, "away from this, and begin the old life once more. I must leave in the morning at daybreak. I have got into this weary slavery of 'getting on in the world,' and dare not stop. Politics now shall be everything to me. For that I must live, and lose everything. That excitement is delicious, and once fairly enthralled you forget much — everything you wish to forget. So they tell me. That is to be the one aim of my life now. And I have a tolerably strong purpose, and shall carry it out. Others tell me it is all Dead Sea apples, full of dust and husks. I suppose I shall find out at the end, when perhaps it is too late — who knows?"

During this speech Diana's face had been glowing, and her little heart fluttering, and the words, hurrying to her lips, stopped at that delicate threshold and crowded back again. Now the people were rushing past them, for the roar of fireworks that were to end the night had set in. Already the glow of red sulphuric fire was lighting up twenty thousand faces all turned in one direction. He felt her arm trembling in his. He looked down to that gentle face glowing in the light.

"Robert," he heard her whisper, "when I saw you last I know I gave you much pain. I did not mean to do it, but was obliged—and—and—I felt as much myself. Now, I could not refuse what you then proposed."





## CHAPTER XXI.

### HAPPINESS.

**N**OW the fireworks were over. The last set piece, with its gold and silver fires, its inscription in a blaze of glory, "*Vive Léopold!*" had sputtered and cascaded, and finally smouldered out. The lieges had gone home; the riflemen were heavy with drink; the glorious night was over. Diana, with her heart like a bird's, now laughing, now crying, was busy with her little maid putting her things together. She was so happy, poor little thing—never indeed to be so happy through the whole of her long life that was to follow. If among the dispositions of life some such privation could be contrived, temporarily, analogous to putting a hearty voluptuary on bread and water for a week, we might thus negatively learn to appreciate blessings we are now a little indifferent to. The little maid, Polly, was as happy as herself. The grim servitude of the governess was gone for ever; nothing but happiness was coming. And to Polly she can confide another secret which the night had brought.

Not less happy the "cold" Robert had returned to his hotel, thinking over these wonderful changes. Nothing was more exquisite than the contrast of the poor lone, exiled girl, wasting out of life almost, and the alteration which his news had wrought. It might seem almost too

melodramatic, this sudden alteration of fortune ; but there had been no exaggeration. The vivacious and almost omniscient *Regent Street Chronicle* let the public into the secret almost as soon as Bligh had told Diana. That very evening's impression of the agreeable journal had a paragraph like this :—

“It seems we have not yet done with the existing *cause célèbre* of *Gay v. Gay*. Trusting Britons who believe in the verdicts of juries as final things—as sacred a thing in its way as a text—will receive a rude shock by learning that the whole is likely to be reopened. Justice, in short, has not been done. New evidence has been discovered—there will be application to ‘the full court,’—not after dinner, of course—a new commission ‘sped,’ fresh fees, new briefs, new consultations, in short the old process of legal oyster-opening, and, it must be added, of legal oyster-eating. It seems that a very distinguished barrister, who is also a member of Parliament, took a fancy for looking through some of the family papers, and came on an old correspondence which clearly sets out *another* marriage—a previous one, and under equally disreputable circumstances. A marriage in every port, like that of the British tar, seems to have been a weakness in this gentleman. Only for persons in his class there is hardly such extenuation. It is said to be inscribed under his own hand, which makes everything charmingly satisfactory.”

The journal had certainly hit on the truth. It almost seemed as though it had mysterious familiars engaged, who had been present in Bligh's study on that recent night when he had been busy searching through Diana's papers.

It was a weary task, and seemed a hopeless one ; but he gave to it nearly his whole night. Nothing is so wearing as this searching and deciphering of crowded small *female* handwriting. It even pained his eyes. It was not until the grey of the morning that he came upon a hand that he seemed to know—some half a dozen letters

tied up in the middle of another. He turned to the signature of the very first he opened, and found it was his mother's name. There was the name "Potter," the English chaplain's, which he had seen before, dotted over the page; and here too were other letters, and one or two in a foreign female hand, and one very long one in feeble handwriting, signed "Walter Gay." He bent forward to the lamp and read first his mother's. If the *Regent Street Chronicle* could have been looking over his shoulders! It was a short letter too. It was addressed to "Mrs. Gay, of Gay Court," and was dated from Boulogne. "We are still nearer," she wrote, "and before I write again we shall know something. Walter is ill and nervous about himself, though not in any danger. Since that creature left him he begins to see what she is—God knows, late enough! It was wonderful my falling in with that fellow Potter; but the moment he passed Walter in the street I saw that they had known each other. The moment, too, I felt a napoleon in the letter Walter gave the maid for him I suspected more. I have had my eye on them both, and I can see they feel a dread. Oh, I do feel we are working in the cause of decency and honour, so outraged by this scandalous business. If it had been my own child I would have cheerfully sacrificed—if I died for it—one who had so little regard for the decency and honour of his family.

"P.S.—I shall not spare money, you may depend on it. That Potter is to be bought."

He took up another letter. No. 2 ran (it was also from her):—

"'That Potter is to be bought,' I wrote to you last. He *is* bought, and not very dearly. Just what we suspected. He was chaplain at Aix-la-Chapelle. I can see the dread of him in Walter's face, as he lies there ill, and I can hear his imploring. This man suspected me when I first saw him. He had heard that Walter had married an heiress with enormous wealth. That had drawn him from the mean slums in which he was burrowing. De-

pend upon it, we shall discover something, and, after all your sufferings and mortifications, your good old family will be rescued from the disgrace this unfortunate creature has heaped upon it."

Robert Bligh leant back in his chair, and looked thoughtfully upwards. He never started or showed outward surprise or astonishment at any event. He took No. 3, and read on. It was the usual common form of breaking bad news, though it was done in a businesslike way:—

"Poor Walter died last night, with all his disgraces and troubles upon his head. In the morning he had taken it into his head I was going away, and he wrote me the letter I enclose, in which he all but confesses what we suspected. There can be no explaining this matter on any other construction. With his death I knew we should have all from Potter. *The other woman was alive when he married* this wretched French creature. A little more money, and Potter will get us certificate—everything."

There were many other letters, chiefly from Mrs. Bligh, but all detailing the advancing stages of the business. Finally he came on the certificates, one of marriage, one of a death, and on a last letter from Mrs. Bligh:—

"As for his child in the convent, she must be left there. She has nothing to do with us now. They will be glad to keep her: they have had more than ever was paid for such a worthless bastard; and if they like, they can turn her into a lay sister, and make her drudge. In this country the thing is so common that that is the regular way for dealing with cases of this kind. At any rate, you are done with her for ever, and dear old Gay will not be desecrated.

*"Now, what I advise is this: all to be kept a profound secret; let the whole die out gradually. We cannot suppress this story, but now poor soul himself is gone. But, thank God, it is no marriage—a vile connection, and so you can*

*give out*: and if the busy gossips want particulars, and say, 'Why, we thought it was given out and acknowledged,' just contradict them at once, and give no explanations. If they have any doubts, let them move in the matter. Then it will be time to prove all. But thank Heaven all has ended so happily. For safety's sake destroy all I have written to you. But put by the certificates, which are more precious than gold. Now you can look out for an heiress for 'steady John,' the heir and hope of Gay Court."

Bligh thought he almost heard his mother speaking; yet she was young then. As he finished, his hands covered his face, and it was long before he recovered this cruel shock. His mother, that he thus loved, being so transported with hatred as to descend to this fearful vindictiveness and injustice!

With the morning he was with the solicitors on the other side, and had told them what he had discovered, and that the whole matter would have to be reopened. He did not, of course, "show his hand," as the phrase is, but he told them, calmly and plainly, that the chances of their holding their verdict were very slight, a statement that made a deep impression on the partners, for they knew Mr. Bligh—that he "spoke by the card," and had no "bounce" in him. They were fair, open, honourable men, standing high in the profession as family solicitors, and not inclined to "make costs."

"If it be as you say, Mr. Bligh," one said, "of course there might be ground for a compromise."

He was then tempted by this tone to let them know a little of the grounds. He sketched out the outline of what he had discovered.

"Better speak to her," they said; and he hurried off to the plaintiff in the now famous case.

When Robert Bligh reached the house where Madame Saxe was staying, he found it lit up, with sounds of music inside. It had the air of a party. No doubt she was

celebrating the victory. As he entered he heard the noisy, monkey-like chatter of foreign voices within. He wrote something on a card, and sent it to Miss Eugenie Gay, telling the servant to give it to her privately. In a moment Eugenie had come out to him.

"Come in here," she said, and led him into a parlour. "She has asked people here to-night, and I must appear to be gay and merry. She has brought in all these strange people—and oh, Mr. Bligh, I wish we had never come here. They say to me, 'You are now mistress of this place, and of vast wealth;' but I shall be miserable, I know. She and they will do what they please with it."

"I came to speak to you about that," said Bligh gently.

She started.

"What, you have thought over what I so foolishly said? Oh, if you knew the shame I felt, what must you have thought of me!"

"Thought of you?" he repeated. "That you did me an honour I was totally unworthy of, and which, had it come at another time, I should have been proud and happy to have acknowledged. But now shall I tell what I have come to you for? It is again about this law-suit."

"I am tired of it," she said impatiently.

"Then I have less scruple in telling you what I am about to say."

He then began and told her all that has been so lately told to the reader—his discovery; the new chances *in* Diana's favour; and, finally, delicately hinted at what he had hinted to the solicitors. She listened with a flush rising in her cheek.

"You are still in *her* interest, and now would take from me, for her sake, what the law has given me. You are a warm friend and ally, Mr. Bligh. But don't you think this is expecting a little too much from me?"

"I know and feel how it looks," said Bligh, "but it is as much—or nearly as much—in your interest as hers. I know pretty well what litigation is, and how miserably

it will end if it once sets in. All I say is, consult your friends, get the advice of the best lawyers, and I shall let them see what has been discovered. If you do not, I must tell you plainly you are sure to lose all again."

"What is this counsel?" said a sharp, shrill voice, and madame was standing before them. "Lose all again! Who will make us lose, pray? Oh, Mr. Bligh! is this the game?"

He was not a little embarrassed. The look of his embassy *was* a little awkward. Yet he felt he must explain now, and he did so, as he had done to the young girl. The Frenchwoman listened with undisguised scorn and contempt.

"This is your story, is it? Very clever and very well contrived. Then you may return, and tell her from me it will not do—that no trick of the kind shall take from us what the English law has given to us. There, Monsieur Bligh, I say. Why do you intrude into our concerns? What title have you? What are these plots? Come, Eugenie," and she took her arm, and half drew her charge away from the room.

Now, this position was certainly disagreeable for Mr. Bligh; and the servants of duty and principle are often thus misconstrued. No one had latterly begun to feel this so much as he himself, and at that moment the reflection occurred to him, as his mind stretched back to the ball at Gay Court, in the old, old days, when every one was saying to him that "he was so wise" and "knowing," and that "Mr. Bob would always fall on his feet." It seemed to him that somehow speeches of this sort were the only return he received for these "Quixotic" good offices.

Suddenly the door was opened softly, and Eugenie stole back.

"Never mind her," she said; "I shall do what you wish. In the morning I shall write to you. After all, it will help me to get away from this wretched land."

Before the next day had passed over a basis for a com-

promise had been sketched out. It was agreed that it should be left to the arbitration of Mr. Bligh, who would provide well for the plaintiff in the case, subject of course to the consent of the defendant. With this agreement in his pocket he started at once for the Continent, and, arriving at Ostend the night of the fête, had seen and raised from death to life the poor little outcast Diana, and was now returning home to his hotel—so happy!—in a delightful dream. What was he thinking of? Was it that, after all, the “game,” as some would call it, of good sense, honour, and, above all, restraint, is not such a losing one, whereas that of impatience, “high spirits,” arrogance, and hurried gratification of every whim and wish is perhaps a stupid “game”—often an unsuccessful one? Then he suddenly recollected his promise to Lugard. It had been given in a moment of irritation, and he felt there was no withdrawing from it. Coming in on his pleasant dream, it seemed like the horn winding out in *Ernani*, just after the marriage.

He was at the *porte-cochère*, and he stopped irresolutely. In the mood in which Lugard was then—disappointed, baffled, full of rage, hatred, and fury—he was not likely to listen to reason or moderation. As he entered under the white and glittering arch (it was the Fountain Hotel) the “patron” came up to him hastily.

“There was a gentleman here—M. Lugaarde—who arrived from England this evening. We heard him mention your name very often.”

“Yes,” said Bligh impatiently; “I know. I suppose he was looking for me. Where is he?”

“Oh, I am so glad, M. Bligh. We did not know what to do, and it is most awkward and painful; and really in the interest of our hotel—”

“But what do you mean?” said Bligh. “Has anything happened?”

The host looked round confidentially, and dropped his voice.

“He is of good family, I believe, and is well connected,



So we thought it better, as he was a friend of yours, to have no noise or confusion until we saw you. But it came on so sudden. I assure you at first the language he addressed to me—I was sending out for the police—seized me by the collar—when madame my wife called, ‘*Mon Dieu !* Don’t you see—he is mad !’ He is out here in the pavilion with two men. Go now, monsieur, as you are his friend. I must request you will see to it. I have behaved with all delicacy, but I cannot have my house compromised.”

Without a word Robert Bligh followed him to the pavilion, and there saw the unhappy and unlucky Richard. These storms of rage and disappointment and ungoverned fury, which he had indulged in through life, had, at last, rushed into this new and more fatal channel. The old race and struggle between the two rivals, which had dated from the old school-days at Wheeler’s, had been thus finally ended. Our hero might now have it all his own way, and finish as he pleased. It was hard for poor Lugard, who had some fine and redeeming qualities : and it may be said in extenuation that much of this frantic temper was but an anticipation of this final visitation—a disease, as it were, and therefore excusable.





## CHAPTER XXII.

### DISPOSITION OF THE CHARACTERS AT THE FALL OF THE CURTAIN.

**N**OW it is time to close this history of a young girl, which set out with sunshine and golden clouds. Those bright, warm days did not last, as we have seen—nay, could not. The rude weather set in, and the young girl found she must take her turn with the rest of the world on the rude highway. Few of her age could have had so many troubles crowded into a small space. They had nearly overwhelmed her, but they proved a wholesome discipline and probation. She was “fixed” and steadied, and that agreeable pastime of making toys and things to play with of other people’s love, devotion, honour, suffering, fidelity, as though they were mere “stage-play” virtues, put on to last no longer than the ball or party—the very *earnestness* of the whole adding so much to the “excitement”—had been driven away and never returned. It was all lightness and want of thought ; but it was, for all that, a dangerous sport.

What follows is almost conventional. A very handsome arrangement was made with the daughter of Walter Gay—some seven or eight hundred a year settled with all form on her—and she went back to her dear France again. Then it became known—through the *Cuckoo*, we believe—that a certain marriage had been “arranged” between

Robert Bligh, Esq., M.P., and Miss Diana Gay, of Gay Court.

Diana herself, a perfect heroine of romance, was seen again in the Row, and it was wonderful how the faithless gathered again about her. She was the "most charming girl;" the dowagers thought her "so interesting!" After all, "What a story! It ought to be written, my dear." (So it has been, as the patient reader has seen.) After all, a little adversity is welcome; it makes everything so precious. How dear, how sweet seemed life and its charming blessings to Diana now! Repulse before victory makes victory doubly splendid. She had her own engaging manner, which she shall always keep, gracious to all. Only one little act of spirit she felt it a duty to perform: she "cut" Viscount Patmore—"cut him dead." She had heard, too, certain things about the pleasant Wally Pepys: some of his ill-natured speeches had been reported to her; and when that fashionable time-server came up in his smug, confidential way, with his scrap of French and his tame jokes, meaning to have many a week down at Gay Court, the young girl coloured, and told him, half jesting, half serious, "that he was never more to be officer of hers." In vain he tried to smooth matters; our Diana was inflexible—polite, but indifferent; and now, as you meet the old sneerer and growler shambling up from the dinner-party, and unguardedly mention her name, he will begin to snap out, "The little *intriguante*! My good sir, I believe the real heiress of Gay Court is in France at this moment. She contrived to jockey the judges and lawyers. It isn't so bad a *rôle*, my friend, to stick to the Attorney-General and Solicitor-General."

What presents came pouring in! for she had plenty of real friends who rejoiced in her fortune—friends who loved and regarded her. The list thereof reads temptingly in the fashionable journal, in the column devoted to such inventories. The gorgeous things, the jewellery, the superb laces, the ingenious bits of uselessness designed cunningly out of the most costly matters; the "blotters,"

which it would be a crime to "blot" with ; dainty candlesticks, dotted and crusted over with bright stones and tracery, and which it would be "worse than a crime" to light ; little caskets—"things to lie on your boudoir table ;" "*Thèières*" china, dressing-cases, dressing-bags, articles of Paris, chairs, tables, desks, "services"—in short, stores sufficient to stock a tempting Palais Royal shop.

Diana was delighted with these testimonials, as being, in most instances, pledges and tokens of regard. In some, of course, they were merely the homage which fashion exacts from the donor—a tribute to his own credit and magnificence.

The treacherous tergiversating *Mercury*, down at Calthorpe, thorough Vicar of Bray of journals, was in raptures at all these things. Its files give fatal testimony to its fickleness. Such a paragraph as this reached to effrontery :—

"Every well-minded person will rejoice in his heart of hearts that this noble old place still remains with the brave old family, through the gallant and peerless young lady who has fought her fight so gallantly, and defeated the schemes of a parcel of foreigners.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, but men decay."

This was inappropriate, as well as dishonest. But Diana only laughed at the *Mercury*, and was a faithful patron, and when its reporter came up to London to "inspect the presents" (four columns are devoted to an accurate "limning" of those articles) the officer was received with all honour, and entertained at "a sumptuous repast" in the parlour. He came once more, on the great day when he and the higher functionary who attended for the fashionable *London Chronicle* met together. What a list of grand names ! each succulent as a French *bon-bon* : lords and their ladies, ceremony by the Bishop of Irnston, the Rev. Doctor Brindley, the Attor-

ney-General and Lady Jane Williamson, the Solicitor-General, the Lord Chancellor, the Lord Bellman, Viscount Chimeleigh, and Lady Margaret Bowman, the Premier (who made a speech), Serjeant Bullock—but it would be wearisome to give the catalogue. Away drives the new carriage; the “old shoe,” launched by a facetious friend, describes the usual parabola behind them; the bright face of our Diana is seen at the window, and Mr. and Mrs. Robert Bligh, of Gay Court, are on their way down to Gay Court.

Soon it will be Sir Robert and Lady Bligh, for he is to be Solicitor-General and knighted in a few weeks; and the *Mercury* tells us “steps are being taken to revive the old Gay baronetcy. One of these days—but they are a long track of years away—he will become Lord High Chancellor, and a peer of England, by the style, perhaps, of “Baron Gay of Gay Court;” but then Diana will be more thoughtful and fuller in face and presence—a lady of fashion, with daughters coming up about her, and Sir Robert rather worn and dusty, with a hundred Parliamentary battles fairly won, and a few lost,—as when he was opposed and defeated at Calthorpe, and was out of Parliament a whole two years; when he and Lady Bligh travelled on the Continent, and saw the great cities, and went up mountains, and sat out in the evening, and forgot there were such things as elections and politics. Long after, when he was restored to the old “ring,” they looked back wistfully to happy evenings. Sometimes they talk of the past, and Diana—who always keeps and will keep to the end that pretty manner of hers, only shaded off a little—talks of “poor Dick,” now, it is feared, utterly incurable, though he has been under treatment for years.

Now they talk of Mrs. Bligh, and on Robert's face comes a shade of trouble. Since *that* breakdown she has not been seen. Proud as ever, she disdained to yield, to own she had done wrong, to forgive or ask forgiveness, or to see the faces of those she had once loved and once hated. In some remote county, in some lonely

town, she grows old, and grows harder and more grim every day, and nurses that old resentment—the resentment of defeat—until she thinks the end will come, the rude bell clang out, and she will die as she has lived. Her son, her daughter-in-law, have made humble attempts at conciliation—pilgrimages even—but all in vain. She keeps herself inclosed, and will not look in their faces.

So Diana moves on in her old beauty, her old gentleness and liveliness, with a little ambition at her heart; but because *he* is ambitious, and waiting for the grander honours to come which shall reward his battles and labours.

The fiery scarlet of Squire Gay's great hunting picture is mellowing down. Often as she flutters through the room, she moves more slowly, looks at it wistfully, and as she goes off kisses a small hand to it, with a sigh as she does so. The room seems to fill again with the old images and figures—the hunting morning, Richard and his rival; the horses are seen in front, on the lawn; D'Orsay is being walked up and down, and the cheery voice of the squire rings out. She is not much changed after all; for as she garners up these old scenes faithfully and jealously, she garners up unconsciously the image of her old self, and remains in the eyes and hearts of dear friends the old DIANA GAY.

THE END.

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